



Forum: Security Council (SC)

Topic: Examining the use of economic sanctions as a Mechanism for Conflict Resolution

Student Officer: Andreas Koutroulis

Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Andreas Koutroulis, and I'm privileged to serve as your Deputy President in this year's St. Catherine's MUN Security Council (SC). I'm a 9th grade student attending Ionios School, and I have a deep passion for international relations, diplomacy, and international affairs. I have been taking part in MUN for the last 2 years now, both as a delegate and in leadership roles, and it has been one of the most fulfilling parts of my school life.

MUN has taught me the value of cooperation, critical thinking, and constructive argumentation, attributes I seek to impart in this committee. My aim is to regulate a committee where every delegate feels comfortable to express themselves, debate on the issues at hand and work towards efficient solutions.

If you happen to have any questions before the conference, feel free to email me: kouand20@gmail.com.¹ Even though this study guide will provide you with a holistic picture of the issue at hand, you are highly encouraged to conduct your own, independent research on your country's policy in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

I look forward to seeing your ideas in action and to an inspiring and fruitful session. I hope that this SCMUN will be a highlight in your MUN journey, as it will be for us.

Best regards,

¹ For general questions on the committee, please contact Dominiki, this year's president: domikout@gmail.com



Andreas Koutroulis

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Economic sanctions represent the most common weapon of the present-day foreign policy arsenal that is used as a measure to put pressure on states, institutions, or individuals without engaging in the use of force.² As a matter of fact, the Global Sanctions Database reveals that a total of approximately 1,100 cases of sanctions have been documented since 1950³, with the post-Cold-War era showing a very sharp upward trend of sanctions, thus, highlighting sanctions as the preferred instrument of diplomacy at the international level. Sanctions may pursue any of the numerous objectives, inter alia, compliance with international law, deterrence from perpetration of aggression, promotion of human rights, or imposition of reparations for violation of international norms.⁴ In order to demonstrate the least possible resort to confrontations, such measures mostly come as trade embargos, asset freezes, or financial sanctions aiming at changing the behavior of the targeted actor.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), being a major instrument of collective security, and the only UN body able to impose legally binding sanctions,⁵ is a very significant actor in the process of both the imposition and the conferral of legitimacy to sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter⁶ which is the part of the Charter dealing with the use of force. The above-mentioned sanctions regimes on North Korea⁷, Iran⁸,

² Ahn, Daniel. *Measuring Smartness: Understanding the Economic Impact of Targeted Sanctions*.

³ Felbermayr, Gabriel, et al. "The Global Sanctions Data Base." *European Economic Review*, vol. 129, no. 103561, Oct. 2020, p. 103561, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eurocorev.2020.103561>.

⁴ Ahn, Daniel. *Measuring Smartness: Understanding the Economic Impact of Targeted Sanctions*.

⁵ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." United Nations, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

⁶ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

⁷ Davenport, Kelsey. "UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea | Arms Control Association." *Armscontrol.org*, Jan. 2022, www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/un-security-council-resolutions-north-korea.

⁸ Beall, Christopher. "The Shortsighted Treatment of Iran under the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996." *Fordham University School of Law*, vol. 39, no. 4.



and Libya⁹ are among the leading illustrations of the Council's moves to employ economic pressure in lieu of a diplomatic solution served by the use of force.

However, the question of whether or not sanctions are effective is being challenged vehemently. Research that has been conducted reveals that the so-called sanctioned cases turn out to be successful in meeting their objectives only in less than one-third of instances¹⁰, with a significant dependence of success on the design, scope, enforcement, and multilateral support features. The largest and most comprehensive sanctions programs have been in the crossfire of critics who accuse these measures of causing grave suffering for the peoples of the targeted states from which a great deal of economic activity goes, whereas carefully chosen or "smart"¹¹ sanctions try to limit the damage to political leaders and elites as the groups mostly responsible for dictating the course of events and enjoying the fruits of power.¹²

Given that the world is becoming a more and more interdependent and internationalized economy with financial networks and off-shore secrecy systems rapidly developing, imposing sanctions has become a very complicated task in which there must be extensive multinational cooperation. To conclude, the sanction politics act as a clear embodiment of the conference theme, "the politics of beyond borders." Those economic sanctions that are directed at only one country inevitably have transnational consequences, interrupting trade networks, changing alliances, and impacting the stability of the region. As such, sanctions pinpoint how state actions go beyond the political and geographical boundaries, thus, revealing the system's interdependence together with the trans-border character of cooperation needed to successfully tackle common challenges.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Elliott, Kimberly Ann. "Evidence on the Costs and Benefits of Economic Sanctions." *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, 23 Oct. 1997, www.piie.com/commentary/testimonies/evidence-costs-and-benefits-economic-sanctions.

¹¹ Ahn, Daniel. *Measuring Smartness: Understanding the Economic Impact of Targeted Sanctions*.

¹² Drezner, Daniel. "Are Economic Sanctions Effective Foreign Policy Tools?" *Tufts Now*, 8 July 2024, now.tufts.edu/2024/07/08/are-economic-sanctions-effective-foreign-policy-tools.



DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Economic sanctions

“Action taken by one country or group of countries to harm the economic interest of another country or group of countries, usually to bring about pressure for social or political change.”¹³ In the context of conflict resolution, economic sanctions serve as a non-military tool aimed at compelling a state to alter policies that threaten international peace and security. They are often used to encourage negotiation, deter aggression, or enforce compliance with international norms

Multilateral sanctions

“A multilateral sanction describes a sanction issued collectively by multiple countries or international organizations acting together to achieve a common foreign policy, national security or human rights objective.”¹⁴ Such coordinated measures tend to carry greater legitimacy and effectiveness, as they reflect a shared international consensus and minimize opportunities for the targeted state to circumvent restrictions. Multilateral sanctions are often applied through institutions like the United Nations to promote collective peacebuilding efforts

Trade embargoes

“An embargo is a trade restriction, typically adopted by a government, a group of countries, or an international organization as an economic sanction.”¹⁵ By cutting off trade in key goods such as arms, oil, or technology, embargoes aim to deprive the targeted nation of resources necessary to sustain conflict or oppressive policies. They are commonly used as a form of diplomatic pressure to drive parties toward peaceful dialogue.

¹³ “Economic Sanctions.” *Oxford Reference*, 2025, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095741439.

¹⁴ “Avallone.io.” *Avallone.io*, 2025, www.avallone.io/dictionary/multilateral-sanctions.

¹⁵ Liberto, Daniel. “What Is an Embargo?” *Investopedia*, 26 May 2023, www.investopedia.com/terms/e/embargo.asp.



Travel bans

"A law preventing people from travelling somewhere, especially preventing a particular person or group from entering a particular country."¹⁶ In conflict situations, travel bans are usually imposed on political or military leaders responsible for aggression or human rights violations. This measure isolates key decision-makers and signals international condemnation, while avoiding harm to the general population.

Economic warfare

"The use of, or the threat to use, economic means against a country in order to weaken its economy and thereby reduce its political and military power."¹⁷ Although often perceived as aggressive, economic warfare can also serve as a conflict management strategy when aimed at pressuring actors into negotiation rather than outright confrontation. It blurs the line between coercion and diplomacy in international relations

Proportionality

"The idea that a punishment for a particular crime must relate to how serious the crime is."¹⁸ In the realm of sanctions, proportionality ensures that the measures imposed are fair, targeted, and not excessively harmful to civilians. Maintaining proportionality is essential to upholding the ethical legitimacy of sanctions as a conflict resolution mechanism.

International cooperation

"International cooperation refers to processes of policy coordination by which states and other entities (such as multinational corporations or nongovernmental organizations) adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences."¹⁹ Successful sanctions regimes depend heavily on international cooperation to prevent

¹⁶ "TRAVEL BAN | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." *Cambridge.org*, 2025, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/travel-ban#google_vignette. Accessed 25 Sept. 2025.

¹⁷ Shambaugh, George. "Economic Warfare | International Law." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/economic-warfare.

¹⁸ Cambridge Dictionary. "Proportionality." *@CambridgeWords*, 4 Jan. 2023, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/proportionality.

¹⁹ "International Cooperation." *Oxford Reference*, 2024, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100007470.



loopholes, ensure enforcement, and sustain diplomatic momentum. When countries act together, the collective pressure can push conflicting parties toward constructive engagement.

Sanction relief

“Sanctions relief refers to the reduction or lifting of economic or political restrictions imposed on a country, typically as a reward for compliance with international agreements or commitments.”²⁰ It functions as a key incentive in negotiation frameworks, offering tangible benefits in exchange for policy change or peace commitments. Properly structured relief mechanisms can transform sanctions from punitive tools into catalysts for long-term reconciliation and stability.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

Sanctions have been a long-used instrument of foreign policy, reaching back to antiquity, when states would impose trade boycotts or embargoes against other competing states.²¹ However, in the modern international system, and particularly after the establishment of the United Nations, sanctions became formalized instruments of coercion to use as an alternative to armed conflict (albeit weaker).²² It provided a means of pressuring states, groups, and individuals to comply with international norms without military force. The UN's sanctions against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)²³ and against South Africa²⁴ during its apartheid policy are just two historical examples, with both being examples of collective diplomacy serving moral and political goals.

²⁰ “Sanctions Relief - (US History – 1945 to Present) - Vocab, Definition, Explanations | Fiveable.” *Fiveable.me*, 2015, fiveable.me/key-terms/united-states-history-since-1945/sanctions-relief. Accessed 25 Sept. 2025.

²¹ “History of Sanctions: The Sanction Origin and Fundamentals.” *Financial Crime Academy*, 13 Oct. 2022, financialcrimeacademy.org/history-of-sanctions-the-sanction-origin/.

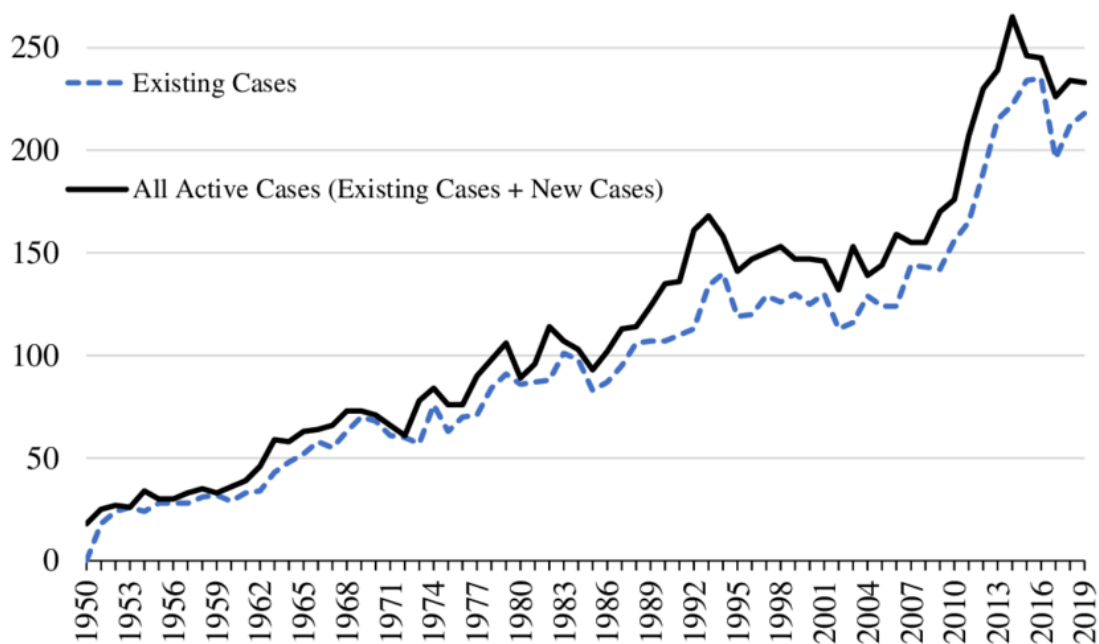
²² United Nations. “Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51).” *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

²³ “Security Council Resolution 232 (1966) [Southern Rhodesia] | Refworld.” *Refworld*, 2023, www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/1966/en/113016.

²⁴ Office, U. S. Government Accountability. “U.S. Sanctions against South Africa | U.S. GAO.” *Www.gao.gov*, www.gao.gov/products/t-nsiad-88-34.



Over the years, sanctions have moved away from broad economic embargoes, and redeveloped toward more targeted or “smart” sanctions that are more narrowly targeted at sectors, individuals (of states), or governmental entities specifically.²⁵ This movement away occurred in response to increased criticism that more comprehensive sanctions had disproportionately inflicted suffering on civilian populations of targeted states.²⁶ So, the history of sanctions highlights how the international community is trying to reconcile coercion with humanitarianism²⁷, attempting to pressure states (or groups/individuals) that violate international law but hoping to spare civilian populations the extremes of suffering. This is the purpose that smart sanctions are trying to serve.



Note: This figure is from Kirilakha et al. (2021), who use the The Global

²⁵ Gordon, Joy. (2011). Smart Sanctions Revisited. *Ethics & International Affairs*. 25. 315 - 335. 10.1017/S0892679411000323.

²⁶ Laudati, Dario, and M. Hashem Pesaran. "Identifying the Effects of Sanctions on the Iranian Economy Using Newspaper Coverage." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3898315>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2021.

²⁷ "Iraq: Humanitarian Needs, Impact of Sanctions, and the "Oil for Food" Program." *Everycrsreport.com*, Congressional Research Service, 13 Aug. 1998, www.everycrsreport.com/reports/98-680.html. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.



Figure 1: The Evolution of the Number of Sanctions, 1950-2019.²⁸

Goals of Sanctions

The main purpose of sanctions is to impact the behavior of a state or other actors that are using behavior that either threatens international peace, security, or human rights.²⁹ Sanctions exist as a means between diplomacy and military forces, coercing compliance through economy, politics, or social isolation.³⁰ They may be taken to prevent some future action, punish a present one, or alter an ongoing policy course-grinding aggression, shutting down a nuclear weapons program, or halting human rights abuses.³¹ Sanctions carry a powerful symbolic message of international disapproval regarding a particular behavior or action, aiming to impress a common set of values on the world stage, while simultaneously exerting practical pressure that deters future violations and reinforces the legitimacy of the international order.³²

Besides punishment, sanctions bear preventive and signaling roles.³³ Sanctions are to deter other actors from similar behavior and signal both domestic and international audiences that actions contrary to global norms will not be acceptable but punished. In some instances, sanctions will be implemented not for serving as a tool of policy change but for limiting its access to resources or technology that may be used for continuing destabilizing activities-such as arms production or terrorism financing.³⁴ Consequently,

²⁸ "The Evolution of the Number of Sanctions, 1950–2019." *ResearchGate*, uploaded by Michael Brzoska, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Evolution-of-the-Number-of-Sanctions-1950-2019_fig1_358697479.

²⁹ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

³⁰ Morgan, Clifton, and Valerie Schwebach. "Is Anyone Listening? International Relations Theory and the Problem of Policy Relevance." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1997, pp. 80–107, dbaldwin.scholar.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf4596/files/dbaldwin/files/baldwin_1999-2000_the_sanctions_debate_and_the_logic_of_choice.pdf.

³¹ Mulder, Nicholas. "The Sanctions Weapon." *International Monetary Fund*, June 2022, www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/06/the-sanctions-weapon-mulder.

³² Elliott, Kimberly Ann. "Evidence on the Costs and Benefits of Economic Sanctions." *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, 23 Oct. 1997, www.piie.com/commentary/testimonies/evidence-costs-and-benefits-economic-sanctions.

³³ Gadjanova, Elena. "Coercing, Constraining and Signalling: Explaining UN and EU Sanctions after the Cold War." *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, Mar. 2012, pp. 137–139, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1662-6370.2012.02054.x>.

³⁴ "Arms Embargo and the Anti Apartheid Movement Campaign." *Www.aamarchives.org*, www.aamarchives.org/campaigns/arms-embargo.html.



sanctions serve both as an important moral and practical tool of international governance.

Legal Basis for Sanctions

A great majority of sanctions are justified or legitimized by the United Nations Charter.³⁵ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which functions as the status-quo state, enforces sanctions in terms of its domain according to Chapter VII³⁶ if need be. The sanctions issued by the Security Council are mandatory to its states.³⁷ In that case, regional sanctioning has its foundations set upon the legal basis for regional sanctioning (European Union³⁸ or African Union³⁹), mostly around the same time.

Unilateral sanctions or those imposed by non-UN states are viewed as some of the most dubious or disputed proceedings in international law.⁴⁰ Some states see these unilateral sanctions permissible in international law based upon reaffirming a right to state sovereignty to ensure or promote international or human rights. Others believe these sanctions lack legally enforceable elements in international law in its totality. In contrast to unilateral sanctions, multilateral sanctions or those imposed by non-UN states but approved or authorized by the UNSC are expected to represent or promote lesser contested or less disputed proceedings.⁴¹ In fact, there are serious controversies with respect to whether these unilateral sanctions are actually prohibited according to international law. Some believe that based upon international law's mechanics or mechanic's per se, unilateral sanctions are legal based upon specified conditions. Others believe unilateral sanctions are illegal regardless of international or human rights.

³⁵ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

³⁶ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

³⁷ United Nations. "Chapter v: the Security Council (Articles 23-32)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-5.

³⁸ "DGEcho WebSite." *Www.dgecho-Partners-Helpdesk.eu*, www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/sanctions/eu-restrictive-measures.

³⁹ *Discussion on AU Sanctions Regime – Amani Africa*. amaniafrica-et.org/discussion-on-au-sanctions-regime/.

⁴⁰ *YEARBOOK of the INTERNATIONAL LAW COMMISSION*.

⁴¹ Lal, Vinay. "Sanctions and the Politics of Dominance, Multilateralism, and Legalism in the International Arena." *Social Scientist*, vol. 25, no. 5/6, May 1997, p. 54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517828>. Accessed 11 Aug. 2019.



Assessing the Multifaceted Impact and Effectiveness of Sanctions

Sanctions have a complex impact, depending on many factors which can include their intended purpose, extent, targets, and ability to be enforced.⁴² Sanctions can limit access to international markets, proactively freeze assets, restrict trade efforts, and/or curtail the flow of money in and out of the targeted area which can undermine a target economy.⁴³ Sanctions can also undermine the politically legitimate claims of a regime, as well as lead to greater domestic demands for reform.⁴⁴ However there are usually unintended consequences with sanctions too: sanctions often increase poverty, limit access to medicine, limit access to food, and create much more difficult lives for common citizens than for the ruling elite.

Over time, many scholars and public policymakers have begun to question whether sanctions work, or have any effect toward the realization of their intended goals for application.⁴⁵ Sanctions can sometimes actually strengthen authoritarian regimes, when they are capable of invoking nationalist sentiment and projecting responsibility for the economic situation onto foreign countries. For instance, the sanctions imposed on Russia, as a result of the invasion of Crimea, although weakened the country norms and caused division at first, they eventually ended up serving the opposite purpose. Economic Isolation strengthened state control, enabled propaganda tactics (many Russian channels often compare the sanctions to the Nazi's blockade of Leningrad, a powerful symbol to all Russians) and most importantly eliminated western influence, resulting in the government gaining even more control and power over citizens.⁴⁶ This pattern can also be observed through other regimes such as Cuba⁴⁷ and North Korea.⁴⁸

⁴² Ahn, Daniel. *Measuring Smartness: Understanding the Economic Impact of Targeted Sanctions*.

⁴³ ---. "Timeline - EU Sanctions against Russia." *Consilium*, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/.

⁴⁴ Gadjanova, Elena. "Coercing, Constraining and Signalling: Explaining UN and EU Sanctions after the Cold War." *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, Mar. 2012, pp. 137–139, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1662-6370.2012.02054.x>.

⁴⁵ Christie, Edward. "Sanctions after Crimea: Have They Worked?" *NATO Review*, 13 July 2015, www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2015/07/13/sanctions-after-crimea-have-they-worked/index.html.

⁴⁶ "Western Sanctions Are Only Strengthening Putin's Grip on Power." *EUROPP*, 11 May 2022, blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2022/05/11/western-sanctions-are-only-strengthening-putins-grip-on-power/.

⁴⁷ Juhn Von Burgsdorff, Sven. *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review Intercultural Human Rights Law Review the Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions: The Case of Cuba the Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions: The Case of Cuba*.

⁴⁸ Chang, Semoon. "Should U.S. Economic Sanctions against North Korea Be Lifted?" *North Korean Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1 Sept. 2006, pp. 36–46, <https://doi.org/10.3172/nkr.2.2.36>. Accessed 2 July 2019.



The overall efficacy of sanctions therefore depend on their enforcement, unity among the international community, and the possibilities for diplomatic alternatives.⁴⁹ Sanctions can still be a big force for action, but their efficacy for influencing change often depends heavily on political and humanitarian alternatives.

Regional Variations

Although sanctions are not universal and bear no similar sentiment across the globe, sanctioning based on geopolitical and regional realities is the current trend.⁵⁰ For example, sanctions in Africa have been applied historically in an attempt to pressure regimes and produce a feeling of human rights or democratization, South Africa with apartheid or Zimbabwe in the early 2000s (economic crisis). In the Middle East, sanctions are applied based on security policy or nuclear proliferation (Iran, Iraq and Libya).

International organizations regionalize these sanctions as well. The EU, Asean and African Union support such movements from the United Nations while human rights or governance issues are so pressing in one nation that they operate independently. Yet Asian and African nations are tied to each other with affiliations and lean toward diplomatic guidance over sanctions. But then again, sometimes those organizations themselves waver. Asean holds a non-interference policy which does not allow nations to interfere in the internal concerns of others;⁵¹ However, the African Union (AU) sanctions Coup d'État for peacekeeping.⁵² Such inconsistencies on a regional level show that geopolitical realities and economic interdependence impact the justification for the creation of sanctions policy and subsequent implementation.

⁴⁹ Drezner, Daniel. "Are Economic Sanctions Effective Foreign Policy Tools?" *Tufts Now*, 8 July 2024, now.tufts.edu/2024/07/08/are-economic-sanctions-effective-foreign-policy-tools.

⁵⁰ Li, Zhentao, and Tianzi Li. "Economic Sanctions and Regional Differences: Evidence from Sanctions on Russia." *Sustainability*, vol. 14, no. 10, 18 May 2022, p. 6112, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14106112>.

⁵¹ Fuad, Muhammad, and Zaheruddin Othman. *Political Managements and Policies in Malaysia E Principle of Non-Interference in ASEAN: Can Malaysia Spearhead the Eff Ort towards a More Interventionist ASEAN*.

⁵² Tomohiro Hosoi. Patterns of African Union Sanctions on Coups d'État: Civilian Control as a Political Message. 1 Jan. 2025, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5317479, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5317479>.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of the Event	Event
18th November 1935	League of Nations Sanctions on Italy: Sanctions imposed after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. ⁵³
26th June 1945	UN Charter Signed: Establishes sanctions as a conflict resolution tool under Chapter VII. ⁵⁴
25th June 1950	Korean War Sanctions: UN calls for measures against North Korea after invasion of South Korea. ⁵⁵
7th February 1962	US Embargo on Cuba: Comprehensive trade ban imposed after the Cuban Missile Crisis. ⁵⁶
12th November 1965	Rhodesia Sanctions: UN Security Council Resolution 217 imposes sanctions after unilateral independence. ⁵⁷
4th November 1977	South Africa Arms Embargo: UNSC

⁵³ Paulson, Steven. "League of Nations Applies Economic Sanctions against Italy | EBSCO." *EBSCO Information Services, Inc.* | www.ebsco.com, 2023, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/league-nations-applies-economic-sanctions-against-italy.

⁵⁴ ---. "Preparatory Years: UN Charter History." *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un/preparatory-years.

⁵⁵ United Nations Command. "History of the Korean War." *United Nations Command*, www.unc.mil/History/1950-1953-Korean-War-Active-Conflict/.

⁵⁶ "Cuba Sanctions." *United States Department of State*, www.state.gov/cuba-sanctions.

⁵⁷ "Security Council Resolution 232 (1966) [Southern Rhodesia] | Refworld." *Refworld*, 2023, www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/1966/en/113016.



	Resolution 418 targets apartheid policies. ⁵⁸
6th August 1990	Iraq Sanctions (Kuwait Invasion): UNSC Resolution 661 imposes sweeping embargo. ⁵⁹
31st March 1992	Libya Sanctions (Lockerbie Case): UNSC Resolution 748 restricts air and arms trade. ⁶⁰
23rd January 1992	Somalia Sanctions: UNSC Resolution 733 establishes arms embargo. ⁶¹
16th June 1993	Haiti Sanctions: UNSC Resolution 841 responds to coup against Aristide.
11th May 1998	Sanctions on India: US and allies impose restrictions after nuclear tests. ⁶²
28th May 1998	Sanctions on Pakistan: Global

⁵⁸ "Arms Embargo and the Anti Apartheid Movement Campaign." *Www.aamarchives.org*, www.aamarchives.org/campaigns/arms-embargo.html.

⁵⁹ Kuwait. *Letter Dated 96/08/26 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Established by Resolution 661 (1990) Concerning the Situation between Iraq and Kuwait Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. 26 Aug. 1996. Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

⁶⁰ United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 748 (1992) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3063rd Meeting, on 31 March 1992*. United Nations, 1992. *S/RES/748 (1992)*. United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/137256>.

⁶¹ "Document Viewer." *Un.org*, 2025, [docs.un.org/en/S/RES/733%20\(1992\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/733%20(1992)).

⁶² Sanctions on India: US and Allies Impose Restrictions after Nuclear Tests." *BBC News*, 11 May 1998, https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/south_asia/93248.stm.



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	sanctions follow nuclear tests. ⁶³
14th October 2006	North Korea Sanctions Begin: UNSC Resolution 1718 responds to first nuclear test. ⁶⁴
9th June 2010	Iran Sanctions Intensify: UNSC Resolution 1929 strengthens restrictions over nuclear program. ⁶⁵
26th February 2011	Libya Civil War Sanctions: UNSC Resolution 1970 freezes assets and imposes travel bans. ⁶⁶
17th March 2014	Russia Crimea Sanctions: US and EU announce coordinated measures. ⁶⁷
5th August 2017	North Korea Toughest Sanctions: UNSC Resolution 2371 bans key exports. ⁶⁸
24th February 2022	Russia Ukraine Invasion Sanctions: Unprecedented global sanctions

⁶³ Diya Ashtakala. "U.S. Sanctions on Pakistan's Missile Program Highlight Nuclear Threats from South Asia." *Csis.org*, 2025, www.csis.org/analysis/us-sanctions-pakistans-missile-program-highlight-nuclear-threats-beyond-south-asia.

⁶⁴ Davenport, Kelsey. "UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea | Arms Control Association." *Armscontrol.org*, Jan. 2022, www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/un-security-council-resolutions-north-korea.

⁶⁵ *Resolution 1929 (2010) * Adopted by the Security Council at Its 6335th Meeting, On. 2010.*

⁶⁶ United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 1970 (2011), Adopted by the Security Council at Its 6491st Meeting, on 26 February 2011.* United Nations, 2011. *S/RES/1970 (2011)*

⁶⁷ European Council. "Timeline - EU Sanctions against Russia." *Consilium*, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/.

⁶⁸ General, Distr. *Security Council Resolution 2371 (2017)*. Vol. 825, 1993, p. 2356. Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.



	imposed. ⁶⁹
21st December 2023	Myanmar Military Sanctions: EU expands blacklist of junta-linked entities. ⁷⁰
12th March 2024	Sudan Conflict Sanctions: New US and UN sanctions target warring factions. ⁷¹

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)

Sanctions are the most common mechanism for the U.S. government implementing foreign policy goals in the world. The U.S. employs sanctions for various goals, including national security, human rights, and non-proliferation. The sanctioned countries and groups are often modified for particular goals, but will often include Iran, Russia, North Korea, and Venezuela. Sanctions may involve freezing assets, prohibiting the trade of goods, or restricting travel of individuals, and are typically enforced through the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of Treasury. The U.S. dollar and American banks hold a particular place in the global marketplace, therefore, U.S. sanctions can have a secondary and, sometimes primary impact on the environment for international trading and financing, even when used unilaterally.

⁶⁹ European Council. "Timeline - EU Sanctions against Russia." *Consilium*, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/.

⁷⁰ "Myanmar/Burma: EU Imposes Sixth Round of Sanctions against 9 Individuals and 7 Entities." *Www.consilium.europa.eu*, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/20/myanmar-burma-eu-imposes-sixth-round-of-sanctions-against-9-individuals-and-7-entities/.

⁷¹ ---. "Security Council Extends Sanctions Regime against Sudan, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2750 (2024) | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *Un.org*, 11 Sept. 2024, press.un.org/en/2024/sc15817.doc.htm.



That said, the use of sanctions often receives criticism based on the extraterritorial reach as it can impact third countries and companies that trade with the sanctioned countries. This is particularly true when dealing with European allies when the allies do not agree with the unilateral use of so-called "secondary sanctions." Nonetheless, Washington policymakers and the State Department seem to hold a position that sanctions are an effective tool in pursuing action that does not involve military use and supports or deters for democratic governance. Therefore, sanctions will remain prominent in the international arena.⁷²

Russia

Russia's position in the world of sanctions has a dual nature: it has been sanctioned in large part, whilst developing a system of counter-sanctions with different consequences to the West's. After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, and when it launched an aggressive invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia responded to sanctions that were among the most extreme ever put into place against a significant nation by the West, sanctioned its banking sector, energy exports, and sanctioned or froze the assets of certain Russian political elites under international institutions, and also nations such as the European Union and the United Kingdom. The sanctions also intended to diminish Russia's capacity to fund its military pursuits and to diminish its diplomatic standing with the West.⁷³

⁷² "Overview of US Sanctions Laws and Regulations | Publications | Knowledge | Global Law Firm | Norton Rose Fulbright."

<https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en-us/knowledge/publications/5522bd68/Overview-of-US-Sanctions-Laws-And-Regulations>,
www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en-us/knowledge/publications/5522bd68/overview-of-us-sanctions-laws-and-regulations.

⁷³ ---. "Timeline - EU Sanctions against Russia." *Consilium*, 2024,

www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/.



Figure 2 : Russia's GDP – evolution from 2018 to 2023, due to economic sanctions⁷⁴

Russia also launched several counter-sanctions: by restricting imports from Western nations, and building up closer economic ties with non-Western nations including China, India, and Iran. The sanctions battle altered movement of trade routes across the world and added to the isolation of the world into East and West economies. Russia characterized the actions of the West as politically motivated or biased, framing them as illegitimate responses. This narrative reinforced domestic perceptions of the West and supported Russia's discourse of resilience and resistance to what it described as "Western domination."⁷⁵

France

France is a significant actor in the EU's broad sanctions strategy and, more broadly, in the international community. France views sanctions as a legitimate tool to accomplish objectives such as human rights, democracy, and international legality, especially within

⁷⁴ "Impact of Sanctions on the Russian Economy." *Consilium*, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/

⁷⁵ International Trade Administration. "Russia Sanctions and Export Controls." *Www.trade.gov*, 2024, www.trade.gov/russia-sanctions-and-export-controls.



the framework of the EU and UN-sanctions regimes. French diplomatic rhetoric tends to favor multilateralism, meaning that sanctions must be viewed and exercised as part of a collective strategy to protect legitimacy and discourage unilateralism. Paris is particularly active, in relation to sanctions from specific regimes, on issues around sanctions related to Iran's nuclear weapon program, the war in Ukraine started by Russia⁷⁶, and the human rights crisis throughout Africa.⁷⁷

Simultaneously, France calls for a nuanced definition of sanctions, one that promotes diplomacy and communication when necessary, and, when appropriate, with sanctions. French policymakers often emphasize that sanctions are intended to persuade parties to negotiate, not to be a punishment in itself. France plays a dual role as an EU leader and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, meaning that it can connect sanction strategies at a global and regional level while contributing to longer-term peacebuilding engagement focused on resolving the core conflicts.⁷⁸

Germany

Germany has a European and diplomatic approach to sanctions. It has historically been skeptical of using such a coercive economic tool because of its reliance on trade and energy imports. Thus, while Germany has certainly become a prominent advocate for sanctions in cases of violations of fundamental international norms, after the invasion of Ukraine, Germany also supported robust coordinated sanctions across the EU, even at the expense of cutting off critical energy supplies from Russia. This represents a historic shift in German foreign policy moving toward a firmer approach regarding collective defense, and toward human rights, in which Christoph Heusgen, the former German perm rep, oversaw a major reform for the country.

Berlin also emphasizes that sanctions need to be legal, proportional, and agreed on among allies. Within the EU, Germany often plays a moderating role looking for consensus among member states with different strategic priorities. Germany has also indicated its support for smart sanctions that target elites, while avoiding collateral

⁷⁶ ---, "Timeline - EU Sanctions against Russia." *Consilium*, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/.

⁷⁷ Office, U. S. Government Accountability. "U.S. Sanctions against South Africa | U.S. GAO." *Www.gao.gov*, www.gao.gov/products/t-nsiad-88-34.

⁷⁸ "France - Global Sanctions Guide." *Ezine.eversheds-Sutherland.com*, ezine.eversheds-sutherland.com/global-sanctions-guide/france.



damage to civilians, bound by German humanitarian and rule of law-based foreign policy. Germany's economic power also assures its necessity to the impact of EU and global sanction regimes.⁷⁹

Canada

Canada has consistently implemented sanctions in conjunction with its democratic allies, most notably the United States, European Union and the United Kingdom. The Government of Canada implements sanctions through the Special Economic Measures Act ("SEMA") in response to states who engage in human rights violations, terrorism, or threats to international peace and security. Canada has imposed sanctions on Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Myanmar, in conjunction with its claims of a values-based foreign policy.

Canadian sanctions are also notable for their emphasis on accountability and global justice. Canada often investigates sanctions alongside its diplomatic relations, humanitarian aid and support for peacekeeping missions in an effort to promote democracy and the rule of law. While Canada's economic scale is much smaller than those of larger powers, the symbolic component of Canadian sanctions provides it with an image as a defender of multilateralism and international cooperation.⁸⁰

Iraq

In the 1990s, Iraq faced one of the most extensive sanction regimes of UN sanctions historically in response to the nation invading Kuwait. The sanctions were meant to dissuade Saddam Hussein from continuing to strengthen his military and avoiding international inspections, but instead, it armed the Iraqi populace to an extent and prevented humanitarian measures from properly taking hold. In the end, millions faced a decimated economy, no food, no medicine; in the end, a successful military sanction but a devastating humanitarian impact. This demonstrates the coercive ability and

⁷⁹ "Germany - Global Sanctions Guide." *Ezine.eversheds-Sutherland.com*, ezine.eversheds-sutherland.com/global-sanctions-guide/germany.

⁸⁰ "Canada - Global Sanctions Guide." *Eversheds-Sutherland.com*, 2025, ezine.eversheds-sutherland.com/global-sanctions-guide/canada. Accessed 22 Oct. 2025.



ethical dilemmas that extensive sanctions can have - and to lessen this impact in future cases creates an understanding of targeted sanctions.⁸¹

South Africa

Throughout the span of apartheid, South Africa was the subject of international sanctions in the form of trade sanctions, arms embargoes and cultural boycotts from foreign countries. These - and domestic global awareness - were key in changing the State's position on apartheid. While the South African situation is unique to an extent, sanctions with respect to South Africa are champions of international economic and ethical pressures sanctioned and enacted resulting in political change.⁸²

Libya

Libya was sanctioned by both the United Nations and the United States in the 1980's and 1990's due to terrorism - in particular, Libya's support of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie Scotland in 1988. Sanctions by the United States included frozen assets in the United States, denied travel access from the United States to Libya and limited access by other countries attempting to trade Libyan oil. However, after years of sanctions and economic despair in 2003, Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi - by the threat of sanctions - complied with the sanction threat by providing fleeing suspects and culpability for the bombing in exchange for normalization of relations. This is a case that shows it is possible to gain sanction threat compliance without warfare as long as the sanction threat also includes diplomatic opportunities.⁸³

Iran

Iran has been subjected to international sanctions related to its nuclear program for years, handed down by the United States, United Nations, and European Union within the context of various economic and financial sanctions, which in turn pressured Iran to discontinue uranium enrichment and/or provide inspection of its nuclear program. The

⁸¹ Kuwait. *Letter Dated 96/08/26 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Established by Resolution 661 (1990) Concerning the Situation between Iraq and Kuwait Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. 26 Aug. 1996. Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

⁸² Office, U. S. Government Accountability. "U.S. Sanctions against South Africa | U.S. GAO." *Www.gao.gov*, www.gao.gov/products/t-nsiad-88-34.

⁸³ *III.M.9 UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 748 (DECIDING THAT LIBYA MUST COMPLY with RESOLUTION 731) (31 March 1992)*. 27 Oct. 2015, https://doi.org/10.1163/2211-4394_rwilwo_sim_032129. Accessed 22 Oct. 2025.



sanctions, or others, may have at times had a substantial weight on the Iranian economy, specifically related to oil revenue and the ramifications of being disconnected from the world financial system, even still, there were actions that led to the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in 2015, which although endorsed a UN Resolution, namely the UNSC Resolution 2231, was actually an agreement between Iran and the P5 Countries, not the UN as a whole. Then, after the US exited the JCPOA and reinstated sanctions in May of 2018, tensions briefly reached a crescendo, short medium and long term. The recent escalations have once again revealed the success and failures of sanctions diplomacy.⁸⁴

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

While NATO does not officially impose sanctions, the organization is a military alliance and not an economic organization, the alliance has an important role in the overall sanctions regime internationally. When member states impose sanctions, especially in response to security threats like Russian aggression or terrorism, NATO provides the strategic and defense authority that balances the imposition of sanctions. Sanctions are usually executed simultaneously or in conjunction with NATO's deterrence and defense policy, creating an integrated political-military reaction against breaches of international peace.

Additionally, NATO's political significance rallies Western nations together, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has mechanisms for consultation and coordination of its members. By means of these consultations and coordination, NATO aligns the policies of 32 member states so that the imposition of economic sanctions complements military deterrence and diplomacy. As such, NATO represents the backbone of Western coherence during an international crisis where sanctions are coordinated along with collective security.⁸⁵

African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) is becoming more and more involved in applying sanctions as a tool for furthering peace, democracy and constitutional rule on the continent. AU sanctions differ from Western sanctions in that AU sanctions are targeted at its member states anytime there is an unconstitutional change in government, for instance through

⁸⁴ Iran, et al. *The Apparent Success of Iran Sanctions*. 2014.

⁸⁵ Plakhov, Demyan. *NATO Sanctions Policy*. 2021.



a coup, or any human rights violations and breaches, or regional destabilization. Sanctions sometimes include suspension from membership, withholding or denying funding, or restricting the movements and travels of leaders pending the restoration of self-governance and democracy. This demonstrates an intra-African capacity for enforcement and an aspiration for "African solutions to African problems."

The AU may encounter challenges in sanctioning a member-state due to its limited economic leverage, as well as a lack of political will to sanction. However, it has been able to exert some degree of moral diplomatic pressure on regimes to adhere to the agreed-upon democratic standards and values. Additionally, the AU collaborates with the United Nations and regional bodies, such as ECOWAS and SADC to impose sanctions, promote regional integration and de-escalate conflict. The evolving state of sanctions highlight Africa's growing agency in constructing its own governance and security architecture.⁸⁶

RELEVANT UN TREATIES CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

UN Charter (1945), Chapter VII, Articles 39–41⁸⁷

In Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the UN Security Council possesses expansive powers to deal with threats to international peace and security. Within this section, Article 39⁸⁸, which empowers the Security Council to determine the existence of a threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression, serves as a procedural gateway for the invocation of Articles 41⁸⁹ and 42⁹⁰ gives the Security Council the authority to determine whether there is a threat, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression - thus functioning as the basis for any collective action. Upon such a finding, the Security Council then can recommend measures to contain the situation or assist with restoration. Article 40 also

⁸⁶ *Discussion on AU Sanctions Regime – Amani Africa.*
amaniafrica-et.org/discussion-on-au-sanctions-regime/.

⁸⁷ United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945,
www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

⁸⁸ ---. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51)." *United Nations*, 1945, www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7.

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid



permits and allows the Security Council to call upon parties to comply with provisional measures or to refrain from hostile actions, providing an opportunity for non-military action open to the Security Council for consideration and action.

In Article 41, the Security Council can specifically recommend non-military action in the form of sanctions which can include economic sanctions like embargos, social services thorough measures like asset freezes, or diplomatic measures and responses. The legal architecture within the Charter provides the basis or legal authorization for almost all UN sanctions regimes, providing legitimacy or authorization for non-military coercive actions. The ability to determine and enforce actions through non-violent means illustrates how the measures under Chapter VII balance state interests with the UN's aim to uphold international law. This framework explains why, over the past several decades, the UN has increasingly relied on sanctions as a key tool of enforcement.

ICCPR (1966)⁹¹

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was adopted in 1966 and has been in force since 1976, imposes obligations on state parties to protect civil and political rights, including freedoms of expression, assembly, trial, and protection from arbitrary arrest or discrimination. Although the Covenant does not regulate sanctions, it draws state attention to the necessity of protection of individual rights that can be imperiled by broadly scoped or defectively targeted economic and trade sanctions. While the ICCPR does not impose judgment on specific measures, the Human Rights Committee considers human impact when determining state compliance with the ICCPR, and is an authoritative interpreter of the Covenant's provisions.

The ICCPR, when contextualized with sanctions, reminds states that international law expects respect for human rights, even in the course of implementing punitive measures. The ICCPR has contributed to the emergence of "smart sanctions," designed to be targeted at political elites or particular sectors to minimize civilian humanitarian impacts. By making the linkage of sanctions with human rights critical, the ICCPR sets an

⁹¹ ---, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." *OHCHR*, United Nations, 16 Dec. 1966, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights.



ethical and legal benchmark for shaping agreements on the development and application of international tools for enforcement.

UNSC Resolution 661 (1990)⁹²

Resolution 661 was written and implemented following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. This was one of the initial key instances of UN sanctions as a means of coercion in modern and contemporary politics. The resolution imposed a full range of restrictions on trade, a financial blockade, and arms embargo on Iraq to force Iraqi forces back to their original positions and to maintain international law. Here, the sanctions demonstrate Security Council ability for prompt, collective action and set the pattern for sanctions in the repertoire of coercive diplomacy vs. armed force. While sanctions under Resolution 661 deliberately showcased military utility, they also demonstrated potential liabilities of sweeping sanctions.

While sanctions from this resolution undermined Iraq's military and economic power, sanctions induced civilian injury and suffering, including food, drug, and other basic commodity shortages. The severe humanitarian impact highlighted the unintended consequences of blanket sanctions, prompting later reforms such as the Oil-for-Food Programme and the evolution of humanitarian carve-outs, which aimed to mitigate civilian suffering while maintaining pressure on the regime.⁹³ This example highlights changing perspectives in the unqualified use of blanket sanctions and offers an impression of necessity for targeted sanctions that actually impose pressure upon the government but spare civilians. As a leading case, Resolution 661 remains controversial regarding the unilateral and collective imposition of UN sanctions on states, even though the UN has a Charter-mandated responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

⁹² Year: 1990), UN Security Council (45th. "Resolution 661 (1990) /: Adopted by the Security Council at Its 2933rd Meeting, on 6 August 1990." *DigitalLibrary.un.org*, 6 Aug. 1990, digitallibrary.un.org/record/94221?v=pdf.

⁹³ "Iraq: Humanitarian Needs, Impact of Sanctions, and the "Oil for Food" Program." *Everycrsreport.com*, Congressional Research Service, 13 Aug. 1998, www.everycrsreport.com/reports/98-680.html. Accessed 10 Nov. 2025.



UNSC Resolution 1373 (2001)⁹⁴

Resolution 1373, implemented after 9/11, represents a significant shift in the UN sanctions mechanism in that it is not sanctions directed against particular states, but sanctions directed to dealing with terrorism. Resolution 1373 obligates states parties to criminalize the financing of terrorism, freeze the assets of those suspected of terrorism, and obstruct or impede the travel of those suspected of terrorism while working together internationally. In addition, the resolution also created the Counter-Terrorism Committee to oversee state parties compliance and adjustments to the program, as a new proactive approach to address threats to international security.

Resolution 1373, unlike traditional sanctions directed at state actors, indirectly applies to non-state actors and calls for broad domestic legal reforms to be able to comply with the sanctions measures, in addition to measures that have preventative elements, not just punitive ones. The impact of sanctions measures based on Resolution 1373 is vast in shape national legislative measures, and global funding measures, to prohibit any financial relationship to terrorism. Resolution 1373, by establishing the mechanism to provide domestic financial reporting of sanctions and other determinations, represents the UN evolution of sanctions, to now include coercive, preventative, and cooperative measures to deal with the transnational threat, something that is specified on Resolution 1373, by establishing quasi-legislative power to the Security Council.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Iraq (1990–2003): UN Comprehensive Sanctions Post-Kuwait Invasion

After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 661⁹⁵, which instituted extensive sanctions on Iraq. The sanctions included a total trade embargo, freezing of assets, and a prohibition on selling weapons, designed to pressure the Iraqi regime into adhering to international law and withdrawal from Kuwait. The sanctions hampered Iraq's relationship with internationally-based markets, leading to

⁹⁴ United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 1373 (2001)*. 2001.

⁹⁵ Kuwait. *Letter Dated 96/08/26 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee Established by Resolution 661 (1990) Concerning the Situation between Iraq and Kuwait Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. 26 Aug. 1996. Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.



economic decline and significantly lessening the regime's capacity to fund an armed force. The international community designed the sanctions to create maximum pressure on the Iraqi regime without immediate action. The sanctions represent one of the largest and most comprehensive sanctions regimes in contemporary history.

Although the sanctions were effective in limiting the Iraqi regime's military capability, they also began to have a major impact on humanitarian needs within Iraq. There were inevitable disruptions of supplies of food, medicines, and other vital goods, leading to increased rates of malnutrition and civilian deaths, especially among Iraqi children. The Iraqi government weaponized these restrictions on the distribution of humanitarian assistance for domestic political purposes and this caused great inequity and suffering in humanitarian conditions.

Libya (1992–2011): UN and Western Sanctions on Gaddafi Regime

In 1992, Libya was placed under United Nations sanctions due to its role in international terrorism, including the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland⁹⁶. The sanctions included freezing of officials' assets, travel bans, and restrictions on military equipment and technology. In addition to international sanctions, Libya faced unilateral sanctions from the West, especially the United States and the European Union, to diplomatically and economically isolate Muammar Gaddafi's regime; sanctions were intended to pressure Libya to refrain from terrorism, cooperate with investigations, and punish those associated with the attacks.

Eventually, and in combination with the pressure of diplomacy and negotiations, sanctions did achieve a level of compliance; Libya surrendered suspects and consented to monitoring under international auspices. By 2011, sanctions had assisted with the civil uprising and international intervention by undermining Gaddafi's ability to maintain control of crucial resources and defend himself against the opposition. The case of Libyan sanctions illustrates that sanctions can be implemented in conjunction with other means of coercion, diplomacy, and military coercion to achieve both compliance and regime change, at least under some circumstances.

⁹⁶ FBI. "Pan Am 103 Bombing | Federal Bureau of Investigation." *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 2019, www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/pan-am-103-bombing.

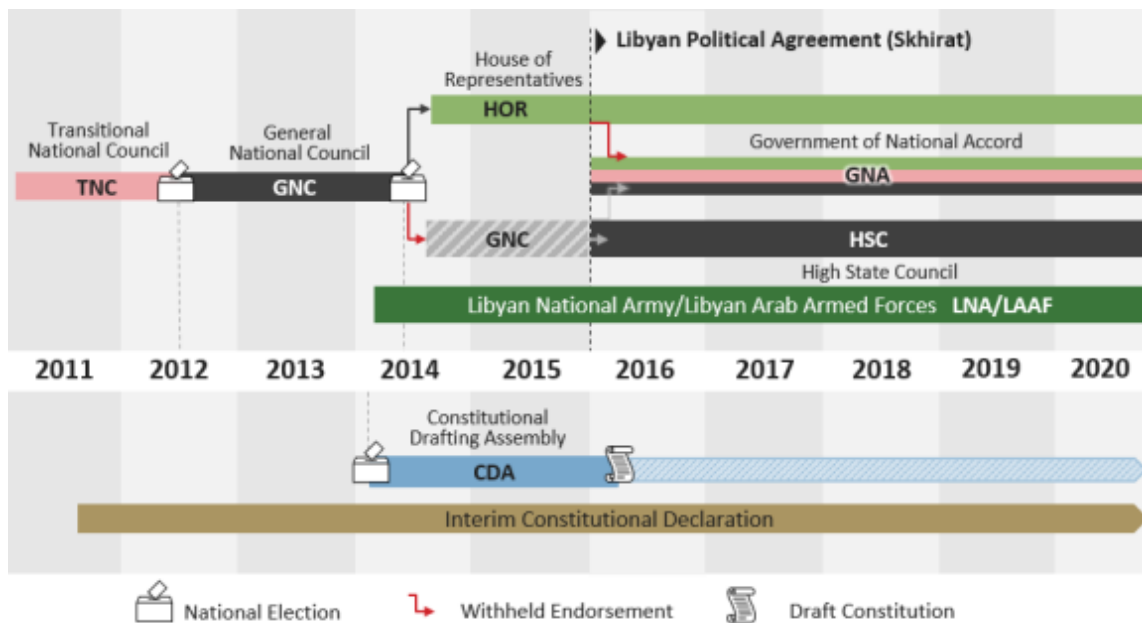


Figure 3: Timeline of UN and Western Sanctions on Libya (2011-2020)⁹⁷

Iran (2006–2015): Nuclear Program Sanctions

Beginning in 2006, the UN Security Council, along with the EU and U.S., imposed targeted sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program⁹⁸. The sanctions targeted access to nuclear technology, freezing its assets, and its oil exports to expedite a negotiated agreement to limit its uranium enrichment and allow international inspections. The sanctions were careful to be "smart" and targeted so that it would not directly affect the population while maximizing the political and economic pressure on the Iranian government and from the Iranian elite.

The sanctions impacted the Iranian economy significantly-cutting oil revenues and isolating Iran from the international financial system. The economic pressure on Iran and diplomatic engagement led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)⁹⁹ whereby Iran committed to restricting its nuclear activity under strict verification. Iran's case highlights how in a multilateral and well-coordinated context of

⁹⁷ Everycrsreport.com, 2020, www.everycrsreport.com/files/20200413_RL33142_63723c438305cefd55f7c285faa73ae3d5d45d96.htm. Accessed 22 Oct. 2025.

⁹⁸ Laudati, Dario, and M. Hashem Pesaran. "Identifying the Effects of Sanctions on the Iranian Economy Using Newspaper Coverage." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3898315>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2021.

⁹⁹ El Khalfi, Mohamad Amine. "AGREEMENT on the JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN of ACTION (JCPOA) between IRAN and the UNITED STATES." *Jurnal Pembaharuan Hukum*, vol. 7, no. 2, 30 Aug. 2020, p. 183, <https://doi.org/10.26532/jph.v7i2.11296>.



sanctions combined with diplomacy could achieve negotiated settlements instead of a full scale war, while recognizing that sustained compliance relies on long-term political context, especially in the context of the U.S. withdrawal of the JCPOA in 2018. If sanctions are limited and not followed by consistent multilateral sanctions, there is a big chance of the sanctions not being successful or them serving the wrong purpose, like strengthening authoritarian powers in such regimes.

Russia (2014–present): Sanctions over Crimea Annexation and Ukraine Conflict

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the European Union, the United States and other partners have imposed economic sanctions on Russian financial institutions, energy exports, and individuals responsible for, involved in, or supportive of the annexation. The sanctions were meant to diplomatically isolate Russia, deny it funds to purchase military-related materials, and signal to the broader international community that the West would not abide Russia's transgression on Ukraine's sovereignty. Sanctions included: freezes on assets, bans on travel for individuals, and bans on the export of certain sensitive technology. The sanctions were a type of economic coercion used to respond to actions by a great power without resorting to military coercion.

Although a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia occurred in 2022, the sanctions expanded and intensified. Sanctions were also imposed freezing the assets of (Russian) oligarchs, partially banning Russian oil and natural gas, and excluding Russian banks from international transaction networks (i.e., SWIFT) and largely imposed by the West against a great power. Overall, the goal of sanctions was to cause negative damage to the Russian economy and create disruptions in international markets while at the same time predictably signalling to the Russian government it was time to end its invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions imposed on Russia by the Western blocs such as the EU, US, and UK are quite different from those that are imposed by the United Nations. The sanctions that are imposed by the United Nations need approval from the United Nations Security Council and are therefore impacted by Russia's veto power. The sanctions that are imposed by the Western blocs are either unilateral and multilateral depending on the intended targets and are also faster since Western bloc sanctions can be more



widespread compared to those that are imposed by the United Nations. Western bloc sanctions are in most cases sector-specific such as energy sectors and people close to Putin and are aimed at economically and politically restraining Russian activities; rather, United Nations sanctions are more related to the emphasis on international peace and security.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Targeted sanctions on political leaders and military officials

Targeted sanctions are intended to impose pressure on individuals or organizations held responsible for committing acts that threaten the peace and security of the international community as opposed to the general population. These measures can include travel bans, asset freezes, and financial and commercial sanctions placed on political leaders, military leaders, or corporations linked to the government. The rationale is to punish and isolate the individuals most accountable for destabilizing actions or violations of human rights, corruption, or aggression while avoiding any worsening outcomes for humanitarian conditions inside the affected country.

Targeted sanctions seek to personalize and render accountability tangible, while showing decision makers that accountability cannot be eluded. Targeted sanctions are aimed at maximizing political impact as opposed to blanket economic sanctions that punish local civilians and more crucial sectors of the foreign economy. Targeted sanctions also help to maintain legitimacy for the international community and public support for sanctions and also allow regimes the capacity to reform without an implosion of the economy.

In conclusion, the UNSC's and its Committees and Monitoring Groups role is vital for the righteous implementation of sanctions. It's their responsibility to supervise the implementation of these restrictions, examine exemption requests (for example, for humanitarian or diplomatic purposes), and update the sanctions lists to reflect political developments or compliance by individuals.



UN-coordinated multilateral sanctions

Multilateral sanctions are those that are developed through a series of nations collectively and may be initiated through an international body such as the United Nations. The rationale in favor of such a system of multilateral sanctions is to help provide legitimacy, coherence, and enforcement of sanctions, to delineate trade, finance, and other such pursuits that are linked with a sanction-targeting nation. Sanctions developed on a multilateral scale through the UN are more legitimate and reliable, and reduce possible discrimination or politically driven sanctioning.

Through cooperation, sovereign nations can close any gaps that weaken unilateral sanctions. Multilateral sanctions will also provide a monitoring mechanism that will clearly outline humanitarian exceptions and established enforcement procedures. This will contribute legitimacy to sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy and also mitigate allegations of bias or economic coercion. In short, UN-led multilateral sanctions represent the commitment of the international community to address crises through a potentially unified, rules-based approach instead of through individual nations or disjointed national efforts.

Gradual sanction relief tied to compliance milestones

A gradual sanction relief process connects the lifting of sanctions to specific and verifiable behavior from the targeted state. The process will contain specific compliance milestones, e.g., terminating the hostilities, allowing for an international verification regime, or entering into negotiations that must take place before certain sanctions are lifted. The thinking behind this process is to convert sanctions from an open-ended punishment to a series of achievable goals, thus providing incentives for the governments to cooperate in exchange for tangible economic or political benefits. This approach also aligns with Article 41's flexibility, resulting in a more just and effective solution.

This process will also provide predictability and transparency in the international system, states that are sanctioned will know precisely what action will be performed to have a sanction lifted, reducing the likely incidence of defiance to or escalation as a result of sanctions. Moreover, this allows the sanctioning states to demonstrate a



degree of flexibility and commitment to trying to peacefully resolve the disagreement. It potentially alters the perception of sanctions from instruments of control to instruments designed to facilitate dialogue. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA)¹⁰⁰ is one example of the implementation of the gradual sanction relief process based on verified compliance with nuclear rules.

Enhanced monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

If monitoring or enforcement is not sufficient to follow through on sanctions, those sanctions may be ineffective in achieving their desired measures. Therefore, more supported monitoring systems are important to ensure that the restrictions placed on certain individuals or entities are enforced. These can take the form of financial intelligence networks, monitoring maritime activity, or collaborating with transnational law enforcement to detect and prevent evasion of the sanctions. The reasoning behind monitoring of this form is to close the loopholes that allow people or corporations who have been sanctioned to move their assets around, cooperatively use intermediaries, or change the destination of their trade to a third country outside of the sanctions to travel through the sanctions.

Enforcement measures can be in the form of collaborative efforts between the UN, regional organizations, and national departments of government. For example, organizations like INTERPOL or the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) can trace illicit finance flows across borders that were deliberately skirting certain sanctions. Enhanced monitoring brings more accountability, as countries or corporations that violate sanctions could be identified and held accountable. Lastly, this proposed solution is more aimed at strengthening or enhancing the credibility of sanctions, whether unilateral or multilateral sanctions, to achieve measures intended, by causing consistent action and application across states.

Combined sanctions with diplomatic negotiations and mediation

Sanctions tend to be more effective when combined with active diplomatic engagement instead of relying on sanctions alone. If sanctions are part of negotiations, the states

¹⁰⁰ El Khalfi, Mohamad Amine. "AGREEMENT on the JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN of ACTION (JCPOA) between IRAN and the UNITED STATES." *Jurnal Pembaharuan Hukum*, vol. 7, no. 2, 30 Aug. 2020, p. 183, <https://doi.org/10.26532/jph.v7i2.11296>.



affected by them have a clear path toward talking and dealing. The theory behind this strategy is that economic pressure should not be considered a permanent punishment; instead, it is a temporary instrument to bring parties in conflict to the negotiation table. This combination of economic pressure with diplomacy also highlights that sanctions are instruments of peace-building (or peace-keeping) instead of instruments of isolation.

Operationally that would involve linking sanction-based regimes with continued peace negotiations, mediation, or other confidence-building efforts headed up by the UN or regionally. The diplomatic channels facilitate communication and accommodation with normalization of relations on a step-by-step scale when and/or if terms are met. This makes international conflict resolution more probable as sanctions are part of a larger political process that deals with the root(s) of conflict rather than with its symptoms.

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