The Efficacy of Economic Sanctions, Economic Sanctions and American Foreign Policy in the Unipolar Era

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Abstract

Are economic sanctions effective instruments of American foreign policy? The consensus view among scholars and in the popular press holds that sanctions are futile efforts, and often work to undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives. The research presented in this study supports the converse conclusion; that sanctions are often effective policy tools which have succeeded in a large majority of instances in the contemporary era. The jaundiced conventional wisdom is an anachronism shaped by bipolar-era studies asserting the low efficacy of economic statecraft. The major shift in the polar distribution of power which occurred two decades ago, however, significantly altered the dynamics of economic statecraft, making it a far more effective instrument of foreign policy for the United States; with significantly lower costs and risks than military force. The efficacy of the sanctions tool, however, may soon begin to wane, as American economic primacy appears to be on the decline and as evidence is already emerging that rising powers are engaging in counterbalancing measures against U.S. sanctions efforts.

Introduction

The conventional wisdom regarding economic sanctions holds that it is an ineffectual and counterproductive foreign policy practice. This prevailing belief is pithily expressed by the title of the influential Robert Pape (1997) article "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work." The view of economic sanctions as a poorly performing instrument of foreign policy was, until very recently, quite accurate.

Economic strategies of foreign policy - as practiced by the major powers during the Cold War– proved to be largely unsuccessful endeavors. This study finds, however, that economic sanctions have become in recent years a reliable and effective instrument of American foreign policy.

The central argument of this work posits that the efficacy of economic statecraft is not fixed; it is not an inherently effective or ineffective practice of foreign policy for major powers. Rather, fluctuations in the potency of economic instruments of statecraft occur in response to changes in the structural attributes of the international political system. The most important of these attributes is the polar distribution of international power. The literature on economic sanctions has, however, paid scant attention to structural variables; failing to adequately assess the impact that the dramatic polar shift of the late 20th century may have had on the effectiveness of economic sanctions.

This article endeavors to address this lacuna in the literature. It assesses the effectiveness of U.S. economic sanctions episodes in the 1990s, thus providing a necessary update to the empirical data on sanctions efficacy, as beliefs regarding the effectiveness of this practice have remained reliant on data-sets that predate the demise of the bipolar system. The efficacy rate of sanctions applied in the unipolar-era is then contrasted against sanctions imposed in the bipolar-era of the Cold-War. This comparison aims to measure the effect that the shift in polarity may have had on the effectiveness of economic sanctions.

Contrary to the prevailing view of sanctions *futility,* this study finds that economic sanctions exhibit a high efficacy rate as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The success rate of sanctions has indeed increased markedly since the end of the Cold-War. In the contemporary era, sanctions represent a compelling tool of statecraft. The structural attributes of the international system may, however, be shifting once again. The current shifts suggest that the window on the high-efficacy of American economic sanctions may be closing.

Sanctions Literature

Scholarly attention to the effects of economic sanctions emerged at lease two thousand years ago. Thucydides, writing in the fifth century B.C., was perhaps the first to chronicle the impact of sanctions. The Greek writer-warrior maintained that Athens' trade embargo on Megara constituted the single most important proximate cause of the epic Peloponnesian War of 431-404 B.C. (Thucydides 1972).[1] Numerous other scholars analyzed economic sanctions in the early modern period, including Francois de Callieres, Adam Smith, and Thomas Jefferson. Modern social-scientific explorations of economic sanctions did not appear, however, until the mid-twentieth century. Albert Hirschman (1945) penned one of the first rigorous theoretical analyses of economic sanctions in *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade.* Hirschman (1945, 17) explained that sanctions can be quite effective against target states when "it is extremely difficult and onerous for these countries, (1) to dispense entirely with the trade they conduct with (the sanctioning state), or (2) to replace (it) as a market and a source of supply."

As the use of economic sanctions proliferated at the outset of the Cold War, so did the attention of international relations scholars to the practice. Several high-quality case studies were conducted beginning in the late 1960s, including the works of Johann Galtung (1967), Anna Schreiber (1973), and Donald Losman (1979), which examined the mechanisms and outcomes of sanctions episodes. These analyses explored the trade sanctions levied against, respectively, Rhodesia, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and Israel, and concluded that sanctions possess low efficacy in inducing policy change. Gary Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott's tome, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered (1985)* (hereafter, "HSE"), represents the first meta case study on the

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[1] Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott (1985, 4) note that Aristophanes assigns the Megarian decree an even greater causal role in igniting the Peloponnesian War than is implied in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

efficacy of economic sanctions, and remains today the touchstone study in the corpus of economic statecraft. The authors assembled a list of every prominent economic sanctions episode in the twentieth century and found sanctions to be effective in only 36 percent of all cases (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1985, 80).

Several recent studies have been more sanguine in their assessments of sanctions. Kimberly Ann Elliott's subsequent independent research displayed more overt sympathy for the merits of economic statecraft. In reference to U.S. influence attempts in the developing world Elliott (1992,102) argued that, "Despite the popular wisdom that 'sanctions never work,' economic coercion has been both a popular and somewhat effective tool of U.S. intervention." David Baldwin, Elizabeth Rogers, and Daniel Drezner, and are among the cadre of scholars who assert that economic statecraft represents a viable and often effective instrument of statecraft (Baldwin, 1985; Rogers 1996; Drezner 1999). Rogers (1996a,434) is one of the most bullish scholars on the subject of economic statecraft, asserting, "Sanctions are underrated," and are "more effective than most analysts suggest." According to Rogers (1996b, 72), the unduly negative perception of sanctions is due "in part because unlike other foreign policy instruments sanctions have no natural advocate or constituency ... As a result, their successes are widely unreported, while their failures are exaggerated by those with an interest in either avoiding their use, or in using other instruments." The conventional wisdom regarding sanctions futility is reinforced by powerful anti-sanctions constituencies, which ensure that sanctions failures are broadcast widely and vociferously, while sanctions achievements are cast *sotto voce*.

While scholarship on economic statecraft has exhibited more balance, debunkers of economic statecraft remain a dominant force. The aforementioned Robert Pape article "Economic Sanctions Do Not Work" (1997), is one of the most widely cited works on the subject of economic statecraft. Pape (1997,106) maintains that "there is little valid social science support for claims that economic sanctions can achieve major foreign policy goals." He asserts that the

HSE study *overestimates* the efficacy of sanctions. Pape calculates the sanctions success rate at a mere four percent; a figure which implies that the HSE study inflated the success rate of economic sanctions by nearly tenfold. Richard Haass (1997,74, 75), another prominent critic of sanctions, considers the growing use of economic sanctions as "madness" and "deplorable," claiming that sanctions "frequently contribute little to American foreign policy goals while being costly and even counterproductive." Omar Abdelsamad (2006), editor-in-chief of the *Harvard International Review*, commenting on the use of sanctions to curtail Iran's nuclear enrichment program, asserted that sanctions are "famously ineffective at garnering change," and "wildly ineffective at producing the desired result."

The reigning skepticism evident in the economic statecraft literature is largely the product of an over-reliance on Cold War-era data sets. Few, if any, academic works have emerged to consider the impact of late-20th century systemic change on the effectiveness of economic sanctions. The primary objective of this study is to redress this theoretical and empirical limitation in the economic sanctions literature. The research presented here expands the empirical set into the unipolar era, and considers the influence of polarity on the effectiveness of economic sanctions.

Polar Theory of Economic Statecraft

This main thesis of this work holds that the principal explanation for the rising effectiveness of sanctions resides in the demise of the bipolar distribution of power. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the entire Marxist Bloc, the dynamics of international relations experienced a remarkable transformation. During the Cold War, the intense competition between the superpowers and their respective blocs frustrated the ability of the great powers to effectively employ material leverage. In this zero-sum, hyper-competitive environment, whenever sanctions were threatened or applied by one of the superpowers the rival power immediately engaged in counterbalancing, offering to ease the costs of sanctions on targeted states to gain their support, and ideally to gain some degree of fealty.

In an era of bipolarity, sanctions tend to be useless against states in the rival coalition, with which there are few economic ties and whose members can expect offsetting assistance from their patron superpower. Sanctions also have little impact on non-aligned states, which play a shrewd and cynical game of triangulation. When subjected to sanctions, non-aligned states easily secure pledges of offsetting assistance from the rival pole, and in exchange these states need offer only rhetorical allegiance. Finally, sanctions fail to be very effective even in coercing allied states. Harsh sanctions can drive such states into either the non-aligned category or into the rival camp. Even when sanctioned allies remain loyal, sender states worry that sanctions may undermine the targeted regime's stability and thus their ability to counter internal threats from groups sympathetic to the rival superpower. This concern acts to inhibit the use of sanctions against allies, and to limit their scope when they are applied.

In a unipolar environment, however, the dynamics of economic statecraft become transformed. States subject to sanctions efforts from the solitary hegemon cannot seek offsetting succor from a rival pole; instead targets are generally forced to absorb the full costs of sanctions. The costs of curtailed trade and aid privileges from the hegemon can be punishing, even debilitating, as the hegemon typically possesses the largest import market, and is the world's largest aid donor. The high costs of denied access to this trade market and aid source, coupled with the absence of a rival patron that can provide offsetting assistance, results in markedly higher material pain for target states. An additional factor that enhances the effectiveness of sanctions in a unipolar period is the greater ability of hegemons to assemble universal sanctions coalitions against a target state. Sanctions are more compelling, and thus more effective, if they are joined by all of the target state's major trading partners and aid donors. During the Cold War, American efforts to construct universal sanctions regimes under the auspices of the United Nations were automatically and instinctively opposed by the Soviet Union. The end of the bipolar era brought about the elimination of the Soviet veto, and resulted in an astounding increase in the number of universal sanctions regimes that were sponsored by the United States and which received the imprimatur of the U.N. Security Council.

The United States possesses enormous leverage in the unipolar era not only as a result of the sheer size of its economy (twice as large as any other), but also due to the dominance of America's liberal economic ideology. American-styled economic liberalism ("orthodox liberalism") has established itself as the hegemonic economic ideology of the unipolar period.[2] This ascendant paradigm emphasizes the wisdom of free trade and unfettered flows of investment capital. The dominance of economic liberalism infuses U.S. economic sanctions with enhanced potency, as belief in the economic model increases the desirability of the same assets (e.g. trade privileges, aid allocations, and loan capital) that can be jeopardized by U.S. sanctions. Sanctions imposed by Washington possess the power to endanger not only trade and aid links with the United States, but also may jeopardize assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as Washington possesses *de facto* veto power in these critically important institutions of international finance.

Although the empirical evidence presented in this article reveals a significant increase in the effectiveness of sanctions in the contemporary era, the polar shift which transpired in the late 20th century represents just one possible explanation for this development. The sanctions literature contains numerous alternative theories which attempt to explain how and why sanctions work. Most theories locate the causal variables at the unit level; isolating particular

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[2] A significant counter-hegemonic movement emerged in the second decade of the unipolar era, and has experienced success in reversing neoliberal policies in a few limited contexts; especially in the Andean region of South America. Still, economic

characteristics which make target states more or less susceptible to sanctions pressure. Recall that Hirschman (1945) maintained that sanctions success is contingent upon an asymmetric relationship between the sender and target state. The key independent variable, according to Hirschman, is dependency. Sanctions are more likely to induce policy changes in target states if the target is highly economically dependent upon the sanctioning state. Dependence is especially acute if the target is reliant on the sanctioning state as a market for exports, and a source of aid (official development assistance (ODA)).

Regime type has a significant influence upon sanctions efficacy according to Irfan Noruddin (2002, 69-70, 73). Democracies tend to yield to sanctions pressure more readily than authoritarian regimes, Noruddin asserts, as the political impact of sanctions is greater upon leaders of democratic states. The author maintains that in all target states, the economic costs of sanctions are typically absorbed by the general population, while regime leaders and politically-connected elites usually elude significant hardships. Though political elites in democratic countries may not suffer immediate material hardship as a result of punitive economic measures, the popular disenchantment caused by sanctions can significantly jeopardize their political survival. Political leaders in democratic countries are thus more susceptible to sanctions pressure, according to Noruddin's hypothesis, and their desire to avoid defeat in the next election will motivate them to more readily concede to sanctions demands.

Another prominent theory which attempts to account for the variegated effectiveness of sanctions, has been posited by Daniel Drezner (1999). Alliance status, Drezner maintains, represents an important mediating factor in determining sanctions success. Sanctions exhibit higher efficacy rates when the sanctions sender and target are allies. Signaling is a major concern of target states, Drezner asserts, as targets are often reluctant to yield to sanctions pressure

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liberalism remains the dominant economic model in the international system, and has become more influential in the emerging markets of Asia.

out of concern that capitulation signals a lack of resolve. The principle concern is the effect of this signal in any future militarized dispute with the sender state. When the sender is an ally, however, the target is less concerned that their security position has been weakened, as the ally does not represent a potential competitor in a future military conflict. Target states are thus more likely to concede to sanctions demands when the sender state is an ally.

I maintain that polarity has a substantial influence on the efficacy of economic sanctions, and assert that a shift in international polarity represents the principle cause of the unipolar-era increase in sanctions effectiveness. Still, it is possible that the change in sanctions success may result less from systemic factors and more from unit-level factors, including those identified by Hirschman, Noruddin, and Drezner. The role of selection bias must therefore be considered in the efficacy increase; that is, does the unipolar era set of sanctions include a greater proportion of vulnerable and pliable target states? If so, the efficacy increase may result from changes in the set of target states, and not from changes in the polar structure of the international system. This study will consider the impact of selection bias by employing *dependency, regime type, and alliance status* as control variables.

Methodology

The principle test of this article's thesis on the relationship between polarity and the efficacy of economic statecraft consists of a comparative analysis of sanctions episodes in the bipolar period and the unipolar period. Case study methodology is employed to determine sanctions efficacy; with government documents, news reports, and academic analyses utilized to assess the cases. A consensus view of the role of economic coercion contained in the leading analyses, as well consideration of official government statements and other empirical data culled from primary sources, has been used to calculate a value for the contribution of sanctions to the policy changes observed in target states.

Applying the HSE scoring model, a sanctions episode is coded as a success if the target state implements significant policy changes following the application of sanctions, and if sanctions made a significant contribution to the observed policy change. (Hufbauer 1985, 32, 33) [See the key to Table 1 for the formula employed to determine sanctions efficacy scores.] The set examined in this analysis includes sanctions applied by the United States - unilaterally, or in conjunction with other states—during the bipolar and unipolar period. For the purposes of this study, the bipolar period encompasses the years 1946-1988, and the unipolar period incorporates the years 1992-1999. The year 1988 was selected as the final year of the bipolar period as the system was fundamentally altered in 1989 with the Soviet repudiation of the Breshnev doctrine and the subsequent collapse of Marxist regimes across Eastern Europe. The time frame encompassed in the unipolar era reflects the first year following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while the final year, 1999, was selected to provide a reasonable time lapse between the imposition of sanctions, and a determination of sanctions efficacy.

The Effectiveness of U.S. Sanctions in the Bipolar Era

Economic statecraft became a central instrument of American foreign policy following World War II, with the United States levying economic sanctions on seventy-two occasions between 1946 and 1988. Sanctions induced significant policy changes in twenty-four of these cases. In forty-eight episodes, however, sanctions failed to bring about the policy changes demanded by Washington; yielding a 33% efficacy rate for sanctions applied during the bipolar era (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1990, 56-62). The results suggest that economic sanctions did not represent a highly effective foreign policy instrument for the United States during the Cold War.

The sanctions efficacy rate did not remain constant during the bipolar era. Sanctions efficacy declined over the course of the bipolar era, as the international system shifted from *thin bipolarity* to *thick bipolarity*. The opening decade of sanctions application, between 1948 (when the first sanction was levied) and

1957, represented a period of thin bipolarity, as the United States retained a significant lead over the Soviet Union with respect to economic and also military power, and thus the international system possessed attributes of both unipolarity and bipolarity. Consequently, the success rate of U.S. sanctions in this period registered at 50%; appreciably higher than the bipolar era mean. Sanctions efficacy reached its depths in the closing decade of the bipolar era (1979-1988), dropping to a 14% success rate. This lackluster success rate occurred at a time when the international system reflected thick bipolarity, as the Soviet Union had reached power parity with the United States. This finding, that the nadir of sanctions efficacy occurred at the zenith of bipolarity, is consistent with the polar theory expressed in this study.

Empirical Results on Sanctions Effectiveness, The Bipolar vs. Unipolar Eras

In the waning days of the bipolar era, it was clear that the effectiveness of sanctions was plummeting. Based on this trajectory alone, one might predict that economic sanctions were destined to become marginalized as an instrument of foreign policy in the coming years. However, the central hypothesis of this study—that the effectiveness of economic statecraft is dependent on the polar distribution of power in the international system--would suggest that the trajectory of sanctions success rates would shift dramatically if the status quo division of power was altered. Of course, the demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the replacement of the bipolar system with a unipolar distribution of power, with the United States as the sole superpower. If the thesis of this work is accurate, the polar shift should have catalyzed a significant increase in the effectiveness of American economic sanctions. Despite the chorus of criticism leveled against economic sanctions, the evidence should demonstrate that sanctions have performed capably in the unipolar era. Evidence of the continued weakness of sanctions, however, would undermine the contention that unipolarity increases the effectiveness of economic instruments of statecraft.

The data compiled by this author confirms the former hypothesis; it reveals that economic sanctions have been remarkably effective in the unipolar era. In the unipolar period examined in this study (1992-1999), the United States initiated thirty-eight sanctions cases, and in twenty-four cases sanctions made a significant contribution to the realization, in part or in whole, of American demands. **(See Table 1)** The efficacy rate of sanctions for the unipolar period, at 66%, was twice that of the bipolar era rate (33%), and nearly five times higher than the success rate exhibited in the final decade of the bipolar set (14%).

Not only did the number of successful sanctions cases (receiving a score of 9 or higher) rise substantially in the unipolar era, but more than half of the successes were *major successes*, in which sanctions constituted a major factor in catalyzing significant policy change, or represented a significant factor in the complete capitulation of a foreign state to American demands (producing a sanctions score of 12 or higher). In at least seven cases--Libya (1992), Serbia (1992, 1996), Guatemala (1993), Zambia (1993), Paraguay (1996), and Sudan (1996)--economic sanctions were determined to be *complete successes* where sanctions represented the major factor in bringing about the complete realization of U.S. demands. In the bipolar era, major successes constituted 28% of all cases. This figure increased to 37% in the unipolar era, which was nearly four times higher than the 10% figure for major successes in the final decade of the bipolar period. Complete successes also increased from the bipolar period by over 60% (11% to 18%), and more than threefold (5% to 18%) over the closing decade of the bipolar period (See Figure 1).

Table 1, Unipolar Era Sanctions Episodes[3]

Year	Initiator/ Target State	Policy Area	Sanctions Contributions	Policy Change	Sanctions Score
1992	U.S. vs. Azerbaijan	Relations w/ Armenia	1	1	1
1992	U.N. vs. Cambodia	Democracy/ Armed Conflict	3	4	12
1992	U.S. vs. Cameroon	Democracy	1	1	1
1992	U.S. Donor States v. El Salvador	Democracy	3	3	9
1992	U.N. vs. Liberia	Armed Conflict	1	1	1
1992	U.N. vs. Libya	Terrorism	4	4	16
1992	U.S.-U.K. vs. Malawi	Democracy	3	4	12
1992	U.S. vs. Nicaragua	Property Claims	3	3	9
1992	U.S. Donor States vs. Peru	Democracy	4	3	12
1992	U.N. vs. Somalia	Armed Conflict	2	3	6
1992	U.S.-U.N. vs. Serbia	Armed Conflict	4	4	16
1992	U.S.-France-Germany vs. Togo	Democracy	3	2	6
1992	U.S.-E.U. vs. Congo (Zaire)	Democracy	2.5	1.5	4
1993	U.N. vs. Angola-UNITA	Armed Conflict	3	4	12

[3] Table 1 employs a scoring system adapted from Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot, (1985, 32, 33). The assessment scores were calculated on the basis of research conducted by this author. See Appendix A for the sources utilized to assess the effectiveness of each sanctions case. The sanctions cases included in the set are those in which sanctions were newly-implemented between 1992 and 1999. There are a few sanctions cases included in this study where the state was already subject to U.S. sanctions prior to 1992. However, in these cases the sanctions imposed in the unipolar period represented significant alterations to the original measures. A few states appear more than once in the dataset. In these instances each case represents a unique sanctions episode involving a distinct set of issues. "Donor States" consist of all, or a large component, of the community of states - including the G-7 members, and other wealthy, typically western, states – which allocate significant revenues to foreign assistance (ODA).

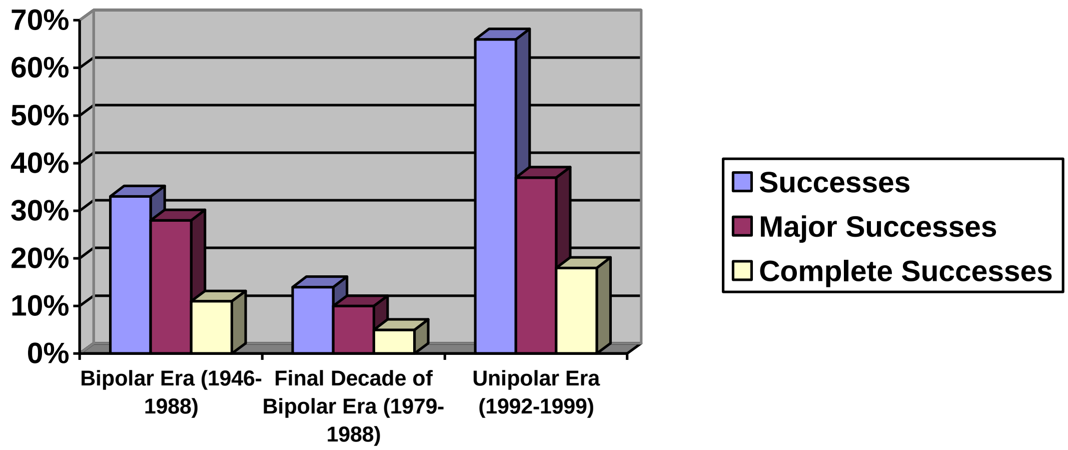
1993	U.S. vs. China	Weapons Proliferation	3.5	2.5	9
1993	U.S.-E.U. vs. Nigeria	Democracy	3	3.5	11
1993	U.S.-U.K. vs. Sudan	Terrorism	3.5	2.5	9
1993	U.S.-E.U. vs. Guatemala	Democracy	4	4	16
1993	U.S.-U.K. vs. Zambia	Democracy	4	4	16
1994	U.S. Donor States vs. The Gambia	Democracy	3	3	9
1994	U.S. donor States vs. Lesotho	Democracy	2.5	4	10
1994	U.S. vs. Rwanda	Armed Conflict	1	1	1
1995	U.S. vs. Iran	Weapons Proliferation	3	2	6
1996	U.S.-E.U.-O.A.U. vs. Burundi	Democracy	4	2.5	10
1996	U.S. vs. Columbia	Drug Enforcement	4	3.5	14
1996	U.S.-France vs. Niger	Democracy	4	3.5	14
1996	U.S.-O.A.S.-E.U. vs. Paraguay	Democracy	4	4	16
1996	U.S.-E.U. vs. Serbia	Democracy	4	4	16
1996	U.N. vs. Sudan	Terrorism	4	4	16
1996	U.S. Donor States vs. Zambia	Democracy	3	3	9
1997	U.S. Donor States vs. Burma	Democracy	3.5	2.5	9
1997	US.-Ger-IMF-WB. v Cambodia	Democracy	3.5	2.5	9
1997	U.N.-ECOWAS vs. Sierra Leone	Democracy	2	4	8
1998	US-Japan-Sweden vs. India	Weapons Proliferation	1	1	1
1998	U.S.-Japan vs. Pakistan	Weapons Proliferation	1	1	1
1998	U.S.-E.U. vs. Serbia	Democracy	3	4	12
1999	U.N. vs. Afghanistan	Terrorism	3	2.5	8
1999	U.S.-I.M.F. vs. Pakistan	Democracy	3	2.5	8

Sanctions score is determined by multiplying policy change score by sanctions contribution score. A sanctions score of 9 or higher is considered a successful sanctions episode.

Policy Change in Target State, 1--Status quo remains intact.; 2--Trivial policy change.; 3--Significant policy change; 4--Complete policy change.

Sanctions Contribution, 1--No contribution; 2--Trivial contribution; 3--Significant contribution; 4--Major contribution.

Figure 1, Sanctions Efficacy Rates By Era



Explaining Sanctions Effectiveness in the Unipolar Era

The increase in the effectiveness of economic sanctions since the end of the Cold War is striking. Not only have sanctions performed nearly twice as well in the unipolar era as compared to the Cold War, but this level of success occurred directly on the heels of a period of steady decline in the performance of sanctions. Why have economic sanctions experienced such a large increase in efficacy in the post-Cold War era? Sanctions have become more effective in the unipolar era as a result of the dramatically altered distribution of power in the international system. The demise of the rival pole has markedly increased the leverage of sanctions imposed by the United States. During the bipolar era, Soviet munificence undermined the threat posed by American sanctions, as recalcitrant states could typically secure offsetting assistance from Moscow.

The U.S. sanctions campaign against Ethiopia offers a compelling illustration of the counterbalancing dynamic of the bipolar era. Concerns over human rights violations and the expropriation of American property motivated the Carter administration to sever military aid to Ethiopia in 1977. Sanctions ultimately failed to inspire policy change, as Addis Ababa simply substituted U.S. aid with far more generous support from the USSR. American sanctions actually represented a bonanza to the Mengisthu government, as the Soviet

Union's offsetting assistance package constituted a fourfold increase over the previous U.S. aid disbursements (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1985, 544-548).

The Soviet Union indeed lavished billions in aid on scores of states across the world during the Cold War, severely weakening the coercive capacity of Washington's sanctions efforts. Sanctions applied against socialist states in Eastern Europe (1948,'61, '75), Asia (1949, '50, '54, '63, '75, '81), and Latin America ('60, '81), were largely futile endeavors as the Soviet Union largely immunized fellow-communist states from the effects of U.S. sanctions (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1990, 56-62). Aid and trade links to the Soviet Union and Comecon members inoculated these states against the effects of American economic pressure.

Sanctions against allies were hardly more successfully. Allied-targets of U.S. sanctions could reliably count on bipolar competition to limit the costs of American sanctions. Washington was typically reluctant to impose sweeping sanctions measures on its allies out of fear that sanctions would destabilize friendly regimes, facilitating efforts by foreign governments or Soviet-backed rebel movements to seize power and shift the state into the rival camp. Sanctions imposed on allies tended, therefore, to be limited in scope and often were merely symbolic. Predictably, sanctions campaigns aimed at allies were largely ineffective.

Economic sanctions became a favored tool in the 1970s to pressure authoritarian allied regimes - including South Korea (1973), Uruguay (1976), Ethiopia (1977), El Salvador (1977), Paraguay (1977), Guatemala (1977), and Argentina (1977) - to improve their human rights practices (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, 1985, 473-478, 535-539, 544-549, 550-563, 573-578). These sanctions measures failed to induce policy reforms as economic pressure was limited--trade preferences were not revoked, and aid was only reduced and not severed. The sanctions imposed by the United States on South Korea in 1973, in the wake of Park Chung Hee's imposition of martial law, reflected Washington's ambivalence, as aid was reduced significantly but remained at generous levels. Park failed to implement political reforms despite explicit demands from the United States (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1985, 473-478).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union severely limited the ability of target states to deflect the costs of U.S. sanctions campaigns. The demise of bipolarity left developing and middle-income states in the 1990s with a single polar source of robust aid and trade -the United States and its wealthy democratic allies. The strategy of defiance, defection, and obfuscation, was no longer available to target states; targets were forced to absorb sanctions costs or capitulate to demands for policy reform. Former rival and nonaligned states could no longer seek succor elsewhere, and allied states could no longer leverage the threat of internal subversion to limit the scope of U.S. sanctions. The dramatically altered security environment and distribution of power in the unipolar system enhanced the efficacy of American economic statecraft.

Guatemala provides an excellent example of the impact of the polar shift on the effectiveness of sanctions as an instrument of American foreign policy. In 1993, Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano launched an *autogolpe*, dissolving Congress and the judiciary, in an attempt to establish autocratic rule. In response, the United States terminated all non-humanitarian aid, and threatened to impose severe trade sanctions if democracy was not immediately restored. Washington also secured the participation of a large multilateral coalition to buttress the sanctions campaign. Unlike the weak sanctions applied toward Guatemala in the bipolar era, this measure represented comprehensive economic punishment. The grave economic threat associated with these sanctions persuaded the business sector, the military, and civil society to abandon Serrano. Within days of the announcement of sanctions, Serrano was deposed by the military and the country's democratic institutions were restored (Halperin and Lomasney 1999, 37; Crawford 2001, 194; Nelson and Eglinton 1996, 177, 178).

The sanctions campaign applied by the United States in 1992 to reverse Peru's democratic backsliding also resulted in rapid redemocratization (Rogers 1996a, 420; McClintock 2001, 139; Nelson and Eglinton 1996, 177; Palmer 1996, 273-276). In most successful episodes, however, sanctions worked slowly, with policy changes not forthcoming for months or years. Still, as offsetting assistance was far more difficult to secure in the unipolar era, the costs of sanctions mounted, and ultimately significant policy changes were realized in two-thirds of sanctions efforts.

The role of unipolarity in amplifying the effectiveness of economic sanctions is reflected in the remarkable increase over the bipolar era in the number of U.S. sanctions campaigns which also enjoyed the imprimatur of the United Nations Security Council, and therefore elicited universal participation. During the entire span of the Cold War, the U.N. Security Council imposed just four economic sanctions measures, and one of these - the sanctions on North Korea in 1950 - was passed during the Soviet boycott of the United Nations. Conversely, between 1992 and 1999, at least nine major sanctions resolutions were passed by the United Nations Security Council, all in support of sanctions efforts initiated by the United States. During the bipolar era, sanctions were levied under the banner of the United Nations less than once per *decade* (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1985, 13-20). In the unipolar era, U.N. sanctions have been applied at a rate of one per *year* (Cortright and Lopez, 2000, 1-2).

In the sanctions cases involving Libya and Sudan, unipolarity enabled the creation of sweeping sanctions coalitions which succeeded in curtailing state support for terrorism. The Libyan episode also illustrates the importance of the disappearance of offsetting assistance. Once a major recipient of Soviet military and financial assistance, Libya became much more vulnerable to economic pressure from the West in the unipolar era. Libya's renunciation of terrorism sponsorship in the 1990s, was motivated in large measure by the marked increase in coercive pressure brought about by the evaporation of Soviet aid, and the subsequent emergence of a universal sanctions coalition aimed at Libya's terrorism program (Monti-Belkaoui and Belkaoui 1996, 27-53; Cortright and Lopez 2000, 107-121; El-Kikhia 1997, 124-144; Anderson 2003; U.S. Department of State (1985-2002); O'Sullivan 2003, 173-232; Niblock 2001,19-94; Rose 1998, 129-156; Slevin 2003).

Universal sanctions measures sponsored by the United States have produced similar successes in policy areas other than counterterrorism, including the bolstering of stability in post-conflict environments. In the case of Cambodia, U.N. sanctions contributed significantly to weakening rogue actors and stabilizing the peace (Cortright and Lopez 2000, 135-146; Peou 2000,397-403; Karatnychy 2001, 119-122; Roberts 2001; Carothers 2002, 13-15). Although universal sanctions measures are not universally successful, they do possess a high efficacy rate, and possess greater capacity to deliver complete successes in challenging cases than do unilateral sanctions efforts. The increase in American sponsored/U.N.-administered sanctions efforts has contributed significantly to the increase in sanctions efficacy in the 1990s. This development materialized as a product of the collapse of the bipolar system.

Testing Alternative Explanations

This study has detected a substantial increase in the efficacy of U.S. economic sanctions efforts beginning in the 1990s, and has hypothesized that a shift in international polarity is largely responsible for this outcome. Yet, as outlined previously, sanctions scholars have identified numerous variables which may influence the effectiveness of economic sanctions. Dependency, regime type, and alliance status, represent three prominent alternative explanations for the success of American sanctions. If the unipolar era set of U.S. sanctions included a disproportionate number of dependent, democratic, and/or American-allied targets, increased efficacy might be expected, and might reflect the influence one of these alternative independent variables. This study should therefore attempt to control for selection bias in the sanctions set. If selection bias is evident, it might suggest that the relationship between polarity and sanctions efficacy may be correlational as opposed to causal; thus rendering the thesis of this study dubious.

When the influences of dependency, regime-type, and alliance status are parsed out, one finds that none of these variables represent a compelling explanation for the increase in U.S. sanctions effectiveness in the unipolar era. Economic dependency does not explain the efficacy increase, as the target states in the unipolar set are actually less dependent upon economic relations with the United States than states in the bipolar set. The unipolar set includes a smaller proportion of states which rely heavily on the United States as a market for their exports. The bipolar set, meanwhile, was disproportionately represented by Western Hemispheric countries, which traditionally have been more reliant on trade with, and aid from, the United States than countries from other regions. Western Hemispheric states comprised 32% (20/63) of the targets in the bipolar era, and just half that percentage (16% (6/38)) in the unipolar era.

The theory that democracies make more compliant targets is, likewise, not a compelling explanation for why sanctions became more successful after the termination of the Cold War. Democratic countries represented a far larger percentage of the target set in the bipolar era (17%), than in the unipolar era (3%). Democratic regime type, therefore, cannot account for the efficacy increase. Finally, the theory that allies capitulate more readily to sanctions demands fails to provide a more compelling explanation for sanctions success in the unipolar era. Considering all of the formal security alliances to which the United States belongs, allies were targeted twice as often in the bipolar era than the unipolar era. In the bipolar period, 37% of sanctions measures were aimed at American allies, while allies comprised just 16% of targeted states in the unipolar era.[4]

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[4] This study thus fails to confirm Drezner's hypothesis that sanctions are more effective against allies. In the bipolar era a majority of targeted states (9 of 17) were American allies, and yet sanctions succeeded in less than one-quarter (24%) of cases.

The augmented efficacy of sanctions was, therefore, not a product of the United States focusing its sanctions efforts on allies, democracies, or dependent states. Sanctions have become more successful at inducing policy change in the contemporary era, not as a result of selective targeting; rather, sanctions success can be explained by the dramatically modified configuration of power in the international system. The sanctions efforts of the United States were strengthened by the emergence of unipolarity, as target states could not expect, and generally did not receive, counterbalancing assistance. Without this assistance, states targeted by economic sanctions experienced significant economic costs and were less able to withstand U.S. economic pressure. This augmented pressure explains, to a significant degree, the increased willingness of states to revise policies when faced with American economic sanctions.

Sanctions Caveats

The decision to use economic pressure should not involve merely a calculation of expected efficacy; it should also incorporate normative concerns about the adverse consequences of sanctions on the general population of targeted states. The evidence from this study indicates that sanctions have become a more successful instrument of American foreign policy. This success, though, may come at great cost to innocent civilians in targeted states. Economic sanctions are often promoted as a non-violent form of dispute resolution, however, when sanctions contribute to malnutrition, disease, and death, this contention is rendered dubious.

In order to minimize the humanitarian consequences of sanctions, policymakers ought to consider the use of measures which focus sanctions costs on the political leaders responsible for the targeted policies. Indeed, greater sophistication in the application of economic sanctions is beginning to minimize humanitarian hardships. Precision sanctions, which concentrate the impact of

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Conversely, a small minority of the target states in the unipolar era were allies (4 of 22), and sanctions succeeded in more than three-quarters (77%) of instances.

sanctions on political leaders and economic elites, can generate substantial economic pressure without destabilizing the broader national economy. Aviation sanctions, weapons embargoes, asset freezes, and bans on technology transfer have a disproportionately greater impact on the privileged and politically connected than on the general population.

In certain cases, the application of maximum economic pressure may be necessary, and the long-term interests of the general population may justify short-term humanitarian hardship. Indeed, externally imposed sanctions at times enjoy significant support from within the general population, especially in cases where the political leadership lacks popular legitimacy (e.g., South Africa). Domestic groups often impose economic sanctions on their own societies in the form of general strikes; a strategy which contributed to the reemergence of democracy in Chile.

The issue of the legitimacy of economic pressure notwithstanding, efforts can be made to limit the adverse humanitarian consequences of sanctions. Sanctions can be equipped with humanitarian offset programs which ensure that the accessibility of basic needs (i.e., food and medicine) is not jeopardized. The sanctions program involving Iraq encapsulated sanctions disaster stories and also success stories with regard to humanitarian impacts. The initial omnibus sanctions were designed to generate maximum economic hardship without sufficient consideration of humanitarian costs. Consequently, sanctions contributed to the marked deterioration of basic human conditions in Iraq and an accompanying spike in the fatality rate, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands, and perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Iraqi citizens, including a spiraling child mortality rate (Cortright 2001). The response to this tragedy, the Oil for Food program - although flawed and tainted by a kickback scandal - did significantly ameliorate the humanitarian crisis and represents one model for how to maximize economic pressure while averting a humanitarian crisis (United Nations 2003).

Often, sanctions campaigns can produce significant results with diplomatic sanctions or limited economic pressure. This is especially true when the political leadership in targeted states is concerned about the ostracizing effects of sanctions. Risa Brooks (2002, 2) suggests that against authoritarian regimes, precision sanctions actually work more effectively than comprehensive sanctions. Social sanctions, which ostracize states from the larger international community, can be as effective as sanctions which cause material harm, according to some sanctions scholars. William Kaempfer and Anton Lowenberg (2000, 183-184) maintain that the cricket and rugby boycott imposed on apartheid-era South Africa had perhaps a greater impact on elites than did economic sanctions.

The cases of Libya and Sudan are instructive in this regard, as the U.N. sanctions imposed on these states in the 1990s were not all-encompassing sanctions, but targeted measures. Libya was subject to a flight ban, an arms embargo, and import restrictions on petroleum-related equipment. The adverse consequences of these sanctions were suffered most directly by the state and by Libyan political and social elites. In addition to trepidation over the economic consequences of sanctions, concerns about the power of U.N. sanctions to deeply isolate Libya from the international community appears to have persuaded the regime to reform its policies on terrorism support. Sudan made similar changes in response to diplomatic sanctions and threatened aviation sanctions.

In some cases, the threat of broad sanctions may represent the only tool, short of war, that will convince the leadership of a foreign state to concede to demands for policy reform. However, in other contexts, more limited measures, with fewer potential humanitarian costs, may be enough to induce change. Irrespective of the expected efficacy of a sanctions approach, sender states possess an ethical duty to consider the humanitarian toll of sanctions measures. States ought to select sanctions approaches which maximize results, while minimizing humanitarian suffering. Indeed, punitive economic statecraft may not always represent the most appropriate or most effective approach. Economic incentives ought to be considered, and indeed these measures of positive economic statecraft have demonstrated considerable success in several cases (albeit, often used in tandem with limited sanctions). A study of the efficacy of economic incentives is presently being conducted by this author.

The Future Effectiveness of Sanctions

This study offers a mixed prognosis for the future of economic sanctions as a tool of U.S. foreign policy. It posits that sanctions are significantly more effective in the contemporary era than they were during the Cold War. The thesis of this work also suggests, however, that the high efficacy of economic statecraft may have a limited shelf-life. If the trajectory of the international political system follows historical patterns, and the present unipolarity dissolves into a more discordant multipolarity, or even bipolarity, then the window for the effective use of economic forms of statecraft is closing.

Although, at present, no single state or coalition of states can challenge the United States in terms of total power capacity, the economic power gap between America and its potential rivals is narrowing, considerably. This is true especially for the European Union and China. As these and other great power aspirants increase their economic capabilities relative to the United States, they gain the capacity to counterbalance the economic leverage possessed by Washington. The likelihood of an increase in counterbalancing activity relates not only to the capability of other actors to provide offsetting assistance, but also their willingness to undermine American efforts. The rise of China, thus, represents the greatest potential threat to the continued efficacy of economic sanctions. China’s recent diplomatic record suggests that it will not replicate the pattern of the Soviet Union; instinctively acting to thwart all U.S. sanctions efforts. China and the United States, however, possess deep policy disagreements with respect to human rights, the status of Taiwan, and a host of other issues. Beijing can be expected to leverage its bourgeoning economic resources and its U.N. veto to undermine, if not eviscerate, the effectiveness of select American sanctions efforts.

The longevity of this contemporary era of high-efficacy economic statecraft will, therefore, be determined by the relative economic growth of the United States in relation to its rivals in the international system. The effectiveness of U.S. sanctions will be impacted not only by the ability but also by the *willingness* of other states or coalitions to wield their economic assets to challenge the hegemonic position of America. Direct challenges to the United States are more likely to emerge if Washington adopts a discriminately assertive and uniltaralist foreign policy, that unnecessarily alienates pivotal actors in the international community. Washington may, conversely, dissuade direct challenges and the attendant counterbalancing activities if it implements a more nuanced foreign policy, adopting more multilateralist policies and wielding more soft power instruments.

Conclusion

Despite the common view that economic sanctions "do not work" (Pape 1997), and that they are "madness" (Haass 1997), and "wildly ineffective" (Abdelsamad 2006), economic sanctions in the unipolar era have demonstrated to be highly effective. The dominant perspective on economic sanctions is indeed an anachronism which continues to reflect the empirical record of sanctions enacted during the bipolar era. Economic sanctions, indeed, exhibited a mediocre success rate as an instrument of American foreign policy during the Cold War; succeeding in just one-third of cases. The success rate of sanctions has, however, experienced an inversion in the unipolar era, with two-thirds of all sanctions episodes ending in success.

The principle miscalculation of sanctions efficacy critics is the failure to adequately consider the influence of international structure on sanctions effectiveness. The emergence of the unipolar system in the closing decade of the twentieth century greatly amplified the potency of U.S. sanctions efforts, primarily as a result of the marked decline of offsetting assistance provided by rival states. The erosion of counterbalancing activities substantially increased the success rate of sanctions campaigns initiated by the United States. Sanctions have become a highly functional instrument of statecraft, succeeding in the large majority of cases.

Economic sanctions appear to be, at present, a significantly undervalued and perhaps underutilized tool of American foreign policy. Trends in the distribution of power in the international system suggest, though, that the era of hyper-potent sanctions may be short-lived. The relative share of global power possessed by the United States has been slowly declining, and if this trajectory continues American sanctions in the near future will possess weaker coercive capacity and will register fewer policy successes. Still, until a significant polar shift manifests in earnest, economic sanctions will remain a viable and valuable foreign policy instrument for the United States.

Appendix 1

Source Material for Table 1, Unipolar Sanctions Episodes

Determination of the policy change and sanctions contribution scores compiled in Table 1 relied upon the sources listed below. Freedom House's annual report, *Freedom in the World*, *The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties* (http,//www.freedomhouse.org) was especially helpful in determining political conditions in target states subject to democracy sanctions.

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