



The Effectiveness of Sanctions in International Relations: A Study of the Russian-Ukraine War

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Abstract

The Russian-Ukraine armed conflict has raised a lot of questions in the study of contemporary International Relations and one of the most pertinent is how effective the sanctions that have been imposed on Russia have worked in curbing the war. In a bid to answer this question, using the secondary method of data collection and standing on the Realist theoretical framework, this study analyzed the issues of war and reasons for the anarchic state of the international system. The study found that nations embark on war if it proves as the only means to protect their core national interests. The study further found that the effectiveness of sanctions in international politics is a product of the collective will of the countries placing the sanction; without such resolve sanctions may just end up being an empty political threat. The paper suggests among other things that, the United Nations should re-evaluate its principles on sections with a view to making it more effective in an increasingly interdependent world system.

Keywords: Conflict, War, United Nations, Sanctions, International System.

I. Introduction

War is an activity that involves the use of force and violence with weapons and new technologies for determining internal or international disputes between two or more nations, between organized ethnic, social and religious groups with a motive of decreasing the privileges and rights of other societies and groups resulting to social, economic, cultural or ethnic issues overtime (Coccia, 2019). Efebeh (2020, p. 281) in his writing on "Conflict Management Mechanism" described

the history of states as one that has been filled with a series of diplomatic confrontations, some that were resolved peacefully and others in war. According to Mingst (2004, p. 197), among the several controversies in international relations, the most pertinent and common among actors has always been the issue of security. She also went further to explain that nations exists in an anarchic, and turbulent world in which every state is seeking out for its own self and national interests – a perspective that lends credence to the Hobbesian belief that the state of nature is a war of all against all, and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short, (Mclean and Alistair, 2009).

Over the years, the international system has witnessed series of disagreement amongst countries which were but not limited to armed conflicts, ideological wars, and trade wars as seen in the World War 1, the World War 2 which culminated to the Cold War, and the US-China trade war etc. Therefore, to ensure a 'balance of power' in the international arena, state actors resorted to the signing of peace treaties, which also saw the emergence of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations all targeted at maintaining world peace, increasing friendly relations amongst nations and deterring one from attacking the other. To further protect this peace-cause, nations either as a group or an individual state brought to the fore the concept of sanctions which is placed on countries and personalities that intend to disturb the 'peace' now experienced around the world.

Sanctions can also be seen as threatened penalties for disobeying a law or rule or an official permission for an action. In recent times, sanctions have continued to be used as preventive measures in



curbing armed conflicts in international relations. More so, according to Iana and José (2015), sanctions are part of a number of tools used to further goals of common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Described by the European Union as 'restrictive measures', sanctions are imposed on governments, commercial entities, and individuals to penalise a policy or course of action that contravenes international and political norms (Iana and José 2015).

Recall that by 1999 and 2004, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) hauled east, getting ever closer to Russia's border and consolidating states that were once under the Soviet influence (Mingst, Mckiben, and Toft, 2019). This according to president Putin was a forthright threat and risk to Russia in addition to European Union's proposed plan to incorporate countries such as Ukraine to the EU economy which Russia also perceived and recognized as a hostile interest, (Mingst et al, 2019). Also, worthy of note at this point is the fact that during the cold war, Moscow and Washington always treated each other with utmost caution, suspicion and mistrust; each viewing each other through the lens of 'mirror-imaging' as propounded by Shannon and her colleague (2016-2017, p. 9). According to them, this mirror-imaging results to enduring rivalries and long-lasting contests between groups.

Therefore, relating this to the relationship between Russia and the United States of America, in 2014, when Ukraine brought into power a pro-western president whose first agenda was to prohibit Russia as the second official language in Ukraine, Russia and other Pro-Russian citizens felt the need to protest and secure Russian communist influence and interest over Ukraine by attacking Crimea, seizing government buildings and several other critical sites. (Mingst et al, 2019). This action brought about a number of sanctions upon Russia due to its illegal annexation of Crimea. But it is important to note here that, despite these sanctions imposed on them, Russian forces did not oblige to the call for them to remove their military presence from Ukraine.

Can one say that sanctions have been effective in the international arena using the 2014 Russian attack on Ukraine and its eventual annexation of Crimea? Because as we know it, in response to the Crimean war, the European Union, the United States of America, and several European countries imposed sanctions on Russia (Mingst et al, 2019). But did these sanctions deter Russia from aggressively attacking Ukraine again on the 22nd of February 2022? (Muzikárová, 2023; Efebeh &

Uwuseba, 2023). Also, as students of international relations, can we attribute the current actions of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine to that of Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany? Can we also suggest that Russia's military attack on Ukraine is a covert continuation of the Cold War and Ukraine is a third party suffering the brunt as a result of its alliance to the United States of America and its capitalist influence?

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The primary objective is to examine the effectiveness of sanctions in international relations.

The specific objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the causes of war and conflicts in the international arena.
2. Study issues that has served as a build-up to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.
3. Highlight the various sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union, the United States of America and other countries.
4. Ascertain how effective these sanctions have been in ending the war and its impact on the economy of Russia as a country.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW:

According to Blanton and Kegley (2016), crisis is a situation in which the threat of escalation to warfare is high and the time available for making decisions and reaching compromised solutions in negotiation is compressed. They further posit that crisis have been very frequent in modern history and this has made it difficult for actors to make rational decisions that might successfully end the crisis peacefully. Between 224 and 559 international, internal and colonialist wars has been fought in the contemporary times, thus, emphasizing the rate at which the contemporary era has been subdued by issues. In her perspectives, she believes that although states are always insecure due to security dilemma, the main reason why wars break out cannot be explained, (Mingst, 2004; Efebeh, 2017; Efebeh, 2020a, Efebeh, 2020b)

As a result of these issues of strife that has continued to bedevil the international system, scholars have continued to express their views on why nations have misunderstanding that in most cases result in armed conflict. This research will therefore pay attention to issues of war and sanctions which surrounds the topic under review, (Efebeh, 2016). Acharya and Buzan (2019) in their work on 'strategic studies and Peace Research' believes that the dominance of a bipolar superpower rivalry perspective on the world when combined with the advent of nuclear weapons, amplified the



concerns with armaments and great power wars that had marked inter-war international relations. Backing this up and to buttress the point on the anarchic state of the international system, the (Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe, 2016, P. 3) noted that at the end of the second world war, the world did not go back to a state of normalcy but rather a new conflict began between the United States of America and Russia. This conflict between the two new world powers gradually multiplied and a climate of fear and suspicion reigned.

Still on the issue of states and why they engage in wars, Rummel(1979) is of the opinion that great power is not necessary or sufficient for conflict behaviour as weak states do go to war. However, power stimulates and aggravates issues, giving them a more global significance. To him, the more powers a state have in a conflict, the more conflict behaviour there is likely to be.

In analysing the above as it relates to the aggressive invasion of Ukraine by Russia on the 22nd of February, 2022, one will find that Russia believed in its superior military, and economic might when compared to Ukraine, hence, rather than engage in negotiations and peaceful dialogue that could have averted the ongoing war, it (Russia), decided to attack Ukraine, a weaker country.

Talking about the Russian-Ukraine war, (Efebeh & Uwuseba, 2023) is of the opinion that prior to the recent attack on Ukraine by Russia, in 2014, Russia had also attacked and illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimea and despite the baggage of sanctions imposed on it, Russia's military presence was still very much felt in the region and around Ukraine's Border. She went further by stating that power is a significant tool in conflicts and wars in international relations because the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 by Russia is one that is focused on the distribution of power and interests of states involved. Russia perceived the growing western influence on Ukraine as a security threat and felt the need to destabilize Ukraine using superior military power and also protect and maintain its communist influence over the region.

The National Academies Press (2000) states that as much as international conflicts still include old-fashioned war, which sometimes involves at least one state fighting outside its borders, now some conflicts are treated as threats to international peace and security even if two states are fighting. As a result, concerted international actions including the use of force are taken to prevent, conclude or resolve them. At the end of World War 2, the United Nations was established to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of

war', and as a body, the United Nations Security Council has taken preventive or enforcement actions to suspend the rights and privileges of membership of a member states that violates the principles of its charter as seen in the actions it took against some countries like the ban of South Africa from participating in proceedings at the General assembly until the end of Apartheid in 1994.

Iana and José (2015) also states that the European Union over the past two decades has made a number of sanctions and its role as an international sanctions sender can now be compared to that of the United States, the world's biggest sanctioning power. They also added that in recent times, the European Union has imposed a series of unilateral sanctions which includes but are not limited to conflict management (Afghanistan in 1996), democracy and human rights promotion (Belarus in 2006), and the condemnation and containing of the violation of a sovereign state's territorial integrity (Russia 2014).

The Human Rights Watch (2023) has accused Russia of committing a litany of violations of international humanitarian law crimes including the indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing and destroying of civilian areas, homes, healthcare and educational facilities. As a result, the Human Rights Watch proposed that some of these attacks by Russia should be investigated as war crimes; because according to reports, the areas occupied by Russia or Russia-affiliated forces committed apparent war crimes like torture, summary execution, sexual violence, enforced disappearances and looting of cultural properties.

According to a report by George Wright (BBC News, 2023), Russia assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council in February 2022, but in that same month, it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. BBC News (2023) referencing the above report therefore suggested that the United Nations Security Council is being led by a country that has clearly violated the principles of the charter, adding to the fact that the International Court of Justice has issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin the president of Russia. Therefore, while the crimes of Russia has been made apparent by the Human Rights watch, it becomes pertinent to question the role of the United Nations Security Council as a peace-keeping tool.

In Talking about the effectiveness of sanctions in international relations, Alona Shkrum(2023) in a Time report mentioned that Russia has over the years secured a place in the United Nations illegally and has used its position to veto and frustrate any efforts by the Security



Council to help Ukraine. In his report, he mentioned that Russia has used its veto 143 times more than all other permanent members in the council reducing the peace-keeping world to a mere powerless observer. He also argued that despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the many acts of killing and torture of civilians, "the UN has failed and without change will continue to fail to provide any meaningful response".

According to the European Parliament (2023), due to Russia's illegal and unprovoked attack of Ukraine, European Union countries swiftly adopted unprecedented and tough sanctions partnering with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Japan. Also, the European Parliamentary Research Service (2023), went further by saying that the European Union in order to ensure the effectiveness of these sanctions and prevent circumvention on November, 2022, added the violation of 'restrictive measures' sanctions as a way to foster a truly global alignment.

Chatham House (2023) noted that in response to the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war, the European Union made major decisions in the form of sanctions and one of such sanctions is the Oil Price Cap which saw Germany's reluctance to send tanks and other weaponry. According to Pepijn Bergsen, a research fellow of the Chatham House, Europe programme, "the EU has shown resolve and at time surprising unity in its response to the war".

According to An Roinn (2022), the European Union on the 6th of October, 2022 adopted economic and individual sanctions in response to Russia's escalating war in Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions - in addition to the travel ban, the existing list of restricted items which may contribute to Russia's military and technological enhancement; the prohibition on the sale, supply, transfer or export of civilian firearms and their essential components and ammunition; the extension of the import ban on iron and steel products; prohibition on the provision of maritime transport and related technical assistance, brokering services and financial, of crude and certain petroleum products.

Additionally, the World Economic Forum (2022) is of the opinion that extensive sanctions has been imposed on Russia by the European Union, the United States of America and several other countries in order to restrict Russia's financial and technological strengths for warfare. The Forum added that the war and sanctions is already having an effect on the Russian economy and eroding Russia's economic outlook as Russia has been

largely isolated from the global economy with new economic partners on a limited level.

Economist, (2022) posits that the effects of the sanctions imposed on Russia are important to ensuring the outcome of the Ukraine war but worryingly, so far, the sanction war has not been going as expected. But while the war continues to attract the attention of the world and with the sanctions not having the expected devastating impacts on Russia, the European Peace Facility has on the other hand spent 2.5 billion pounds of cash and hardware in providing Ukraine with defences. (Chatham House, 2023; Efebeh, 2023).

Global Witness (2022) also argues that as the war continues to build up and seeing the role oil and gas plays in Russia's economic strength, western nations turned to economic sanctions as a primary tool to cripple Putin's war machine. However, irrespective of the vocal support by the Ukrainians people resistance, European governments have proven reluctant to act with any urgency to stop buying Russian Fossil Fuels.

Ben (2023) is of the opinion that the Russian Crude is trading at a deep discount as a result of the embargo on Seaborne Russian Crude but while it dropped in December 2022, Russia could bounce back as risk aversion fades. Also, the EU embargo exempts Russian maritime crude oil and products to Bulgaria until the end of 2024 as well as the exports of vacuum gasoil to Croatia until the end of 2023 as noted by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies(2023).

Lisa (2022) in her report mentioned that the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak speaking on the EU's adoption of the oil price cap sanction against Russia, on September 28th, 2022, said that the European 'exemption' clause to its price cap on oil product showed that Russian Oil was in demand. According to him, it once again emphasises that Russian Oil products are in demand in Europe.

Ben (2023) further reported that due to the oil price cap, Russia has diverted its export volume in large numbers to India and China. Ben portends that there has also been a notable increase in oil transit to 'unknown customers' and an increase in ship-to-ship transfers of Russian crude in Europe and Asia that could be used to disguise cargo origin. And when answering the question on whether the price cap has been implemented, Ben said that it is hard to say as there is no public disclosure system, so assessment depends on detective work using insurance and shipping database.

Bloomberg (2023) reported that European imports of refined fuel from India are approaching



360,000 barrels per day which means that India is expected to transcend Saudi Arabia as the largest exporter of refined fuel to Europe. Ben (2023) in his writing suggests that the European Union sanctioned Russia and boycotted its oil, yet is still buying it indirectly from India at a higher price. To him, this is fuelling de-dollarization and inflation in Europe.

It is common knowledge that Russia is one of the world's largest oil exporter and due to its centre-stage importance when it comes to the distribution of oil around Europe, it becomes critical to ask if the European countries will truly implement the sanctions of not buying Russian Fossil Fuels; this is because Europe now buys oil from India, a major buyer of Russian Crude. At this point the fluidity of sanctions in international relations comes to play and its effectiveness stays questionable.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are no formal and informal rules that gives rise to a type of international system structure, there is no supreme authority, no centralized government empowered to managed or control the actions of individuals, elites, sovereign states or even intergovernmental organizations. (Mingst 2004). In her interpretation of the Realist theory, she propounds that the anarchic international system is one that governed by a weak rule of law which is easily thrown away when states determine it is in their self-interest to do so. Mingst further explains that the international system is equivalent to a state of war where there are no enforcement instruments to make states cooperate. As a result, when states feels threatened, they are compelled to go to war. To realists, a state's security interest is strengthened only by its accumulating military and economic power; one states accumulation makes other states less secure,(Efebeh, 2016; Efebeh, et al (2021).

Efebeh (2020) concurs to the above realist assertion when he described the realist theory of international relation as one in which states 'maximize gains and their interests as well as national objectives in their foreign policy pursuit as they relate with other states'. He explained further that realists focus thoughts on anarchy, security, power, balance of power and self-help. Therefore, even with the existence of international organizations, their role have limited effect in determining the happenings in global politics. To realists, the only way to avoid conflict in the international system is a balance of power, one which is of course hard to attain, (Efebeh, 2021; Efebeh & Okereka, 2020).

Building on this backdrop, this work will be focusing on the Realist theory of international relations as it is most appropriate and efficient for this study.

IV. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION:

This study will employ primary, and secondary available on the subject area. The primary sources will include government reports, newspapers and news reports, the Secondary sources will include published works such as books, journal articles and internet sourced materials.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

1. The researcher found that every move made on Ukraine by Russia is a convert move against the United States of America (NATO) and every form of Western influence in the Ukrainian region. Therefore, one can say that the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine is a proxy war when related to the work of Karen (2019) when she opined that Russia has always viewed every move from NATO with mistrust and threatening. Also, in line with this finding is the writing of the Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe, (2016) when it argued that after the Second World War, the world did not return to a peaceful state but rather another war known as the cold war ensued.
2. Additionally, according to a recent report by Ben (2023), the price cap and boycotting of Russian crude by the European Union has pushed Russia farther away to Asian countries with China and India taking the lead in the purchase of its crude. However, a crux to this is Europe now depends heavily on Indian oil which is, Europe still indirectly depending on Russia as the purchase from India is an indirect purchase from Russia. This has also resulted in De-dollarization because India now buys their crude from Russia in currencies other than the dollar.
3. Finally, the war between Ukraine and Russia is beyond using only sanction as a foreign policy tool, this is because, despite the sanctions that were imposed on Russia after its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia still attacked and has illegally annexed some territories of Ukraine at the moment. More so, Russians and their President, Putin is used to aggression and chaos and for such a people, it becomes very difficult to curtail their violent actions using economic sanctions because it (Russia) will go out of his way to look for new markets and countries to align with.

V. CONCLUSION:



The Russian-Ukraine war is another testament to the anarchic nature of man and states. The ongoing war goes further to prove that states will make laws, policies and take actions that seems beneficial to them irrespective of the consequences it will have on other actors. It can however be asserted that the various sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU, the United States of America, the U.K and other countries over the aggressive invasion of Ukraine have proven the place of 'unity' in International Relations and has also sent a strong message on the belief that nations can exist alongside each other; settle disputes without having to recourse to war as Russia has done.

More so, it is said that no man is an Island and irrespective of the economic strength of Russia as a single state, with some of its allies and notable individuals also suffering from sanctions, the sanctions further limits Russia's influence and affluence in the world. States, organizations and individuals alike who would prefer a broader horizon to explore and grow their businesses and economies will be wary of getting into relations with Russia because of fear of getting sanctioned by state actors and organizations that are clearly against the Russian invasion of Ukraine and it's a clear violation of sanctions placed on it (Russia).

However, irrespective of some of these obvious consequences, visible support for Ukraine by countries, and sanctions imposed to weaken and destabilize Russia, the war has continued to brew and the sanctions have not stopped or curbed Russia's attack on Ukraine.

As a result, the big question remains; which are, will the sanctions eventually stop Russia, or are the sanctions fuelling Russia into making new friends?

This writer is indifferent about the effectiveness of sanctions in the international system as it only seems to work on the surface as can be seen in the case of the Russian crude and its export to Europe. More so, sanctions work best when the country involved is not exceptionally strong to stand alone or revolt. Therefore, sanctions in the international system are fluid and subjective.

VI. Recommendations

The United Nations as an International Organization should review the principles of its charter especially as it's relates to its security council whose role is to maintain world peace. This is because, the ability for them to take actions against a belligerent state is dependent on how powerful the state is; an example is Russia. Russia as a veto power state that can overrule decisions and

as (Efebeh, 2020) puts it, this advertently renders the United Nations ineffective and helpless.

The United Nations should seek for a more coherent and acceptable way for the permanent member states to take action on a violent one acting against its principles. For example, despite the oil boycott on Russia, China, a permanent member of the Security Council still buys heavily from Russia, as a result, the intended effects of the sanctions placed on Russia becomes difficult to achieve.

The European Union should stand for international law, call for a peace agreement between the warring states putting into perspectives the interests of both countries. Reports have shown that the oil boycott is gradually taking a toll on the wellbeing of European countries and citizens. More so, European countries now buy oil from India – a major customer of Russia, this way, Europe still patronizing Russia indirectly; so rather than do this, a peace-accord is most suitable. As put in the words of Clare Daly – a member of the European Parliament while addressing the parliament:

“The world population is shaking their head in disbelief of the European Union and its subservience to the US Empire even when it's blatantly against our own interests. Instead of championing peace in Europe, overcoming differences and difficulties through dialogue and diplomacy, we've acted as a pawn for NATO, imposing sanctions and now we have energy crisis, a cost of living crisis, and an angrier nuclear power in our doorsteps. If we want to be stronger, stop playing US war games, stop antagonizing our trade partners...”

Russia as a country should review its aggressive actions against Ukraine. This is because, in its bid to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO, the war is only making it easier and further pushing Ukraine closer to NATO and all of its western allies; something Putin, the president of Russia obviously does not want because according to Besemeres (2016), Putin is not just eager to restore Moscow's sphere of interest cum influence but also willing to dismantle his opponent. His intention is to destroy NATO. But, with the current war. Ukraine is closer to NATO and accepting all of its 'humanitarian' and military intervention as a way to protect its sovereignty as a state.

In war, there is no victor or vanquished, therefore, both states should seek for other diplomatic and more peaceful means to resolve their issues rather than military conflict.

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