**Committee: Security Council**

**Topic:** **The Question of Using Sanctions as a Conflict Resolution Tool and Their Humanitarian Impact**

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**Summary**

Sanctions are a key instrument used by the international community to influence the behaviour of states, entities, or individuals engaged in activities deemed to violate international norms. They are often implemented to deter aggression, prevent human rights abuses, or push for diplomatic negotiations. While sanctions can be effective in some cases, they can also lead to unintended humanitarian consequences, disproportionately impacting civilian populations. According to a 2019 UN report, over 40 million people in sanctioned countries face severe economic hardships, and sanctions have contributed to food and medicine shortages in nations such as Iran and Venezuela. The question of whether sanctions are a viable and ethical tool for conflict resolution remains highly debated.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Sanctions** – Restrictive measures imposed by one or more countries against a state, entity, or individual to change behaviour or policies. These can be economic, diplomatic, military, or targeted.

**Economic Sanctions** – Trade restrictions, asset freezes, and financial transaction prohibitions aimed at pressuring a state economically.

**Diplomatic Sanctions** – Measures such as suspension of diplomatic relations, exclusion from international organisations, or travel bans on officials.

**Military Sanctions** – Arms embargoes and restrictions on military assistance.

**Humanitarian Exemptions** – Provisions included in sanction regimes to allow essential goods such as food, medicine, and humanitarian aid to reach affected populations.

**Background Information**

Sanctions have been used as a foreign policy tool for centuries, but their modern application has significantly expanded with globalisation. The United Nations, the European Union, and individual states frequently use sanctions to curb aggression, restrict nuclear proliferation, or punish human rights violations.

However, the humanitarian consequences of sanctions have raised ethical and practical concerns. Countries under broad economic sanctions, such as North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela, have experienced severe economic downturns, leading to increased poverty, malnutrition, and a decline in healthcare services. According to a 2021 Human Rights Watch report, over 80% of Venezuelans were living in poverty due to sanctions and economic mismanagement. While targeted sanctions aim to reduce collateral damage by focusing on key individuals or entities, they can still have widespread economic and social impacts.

The effectiveness of sanctions depends on multiple factors, including international support, enforcement mechanisms, and whether there is a clear diplomatic strategy accompanying them. Some sanctions have successfully pressured governments into negotiations, such as those that led to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), while others, like those imposed on North Korea, have not resulted in significant policy changes but have worsened living conditions for civilians.

**Major Countries and Organisations Involved**

**United Nations (UN)** – Imposes sanctions through Security Council resolutions, often targeting states violating international laws or engaging in aggressive actions.

**United States** – Frequently employs unilateral sanctions, particularly against countries such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea, often with extraterritorial reach. As of 2023, the US had over 9,000 active sanction measures.

**European Union (EU)** – Uses sanctions as a diplomatic tool, often in coordination with the UN and the US, particularly against states involved in conflicts or human rights violations.

**Russia & China** – Often oppose broad UN sanctions, advocating for dialogue and economic cooperation instead. Russia itself has been a major target of Western sanctions following its invasion of Ukraine.

**Sanctioned States (e.g., Iran, North Korea, Venezuela)** – Countries that have been significantly impacted by international sanctions, facing economic struggles, humanitarian crises, and diplomatic isolation.

**Timeline of Events**

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| **Date** | **Description** |

**1990** – UN imposes economic sanctions on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait. These sanctions remain in place for over a decade, leading to humanitarian concerns, with reports estimating over 500,000 child deaths due to restricted access to food and medicine.

**1994** – US and UN impose sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme. These are gradually expanded over the years.

**2006** – UN sanctions are placed on Iran in response to its nuclear activities. Further sanctions are implemented by the US and EU.

**2014** – The US and EU impose economic sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea. The Russian economy contracts by 2.5% in 2015 as a result.

**2022** – Western nations impose extensive sanctions on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, including restrictions on trade, finance, and technology. The Russian ruble loses nearly 30% of its value in the immediate aftermath.

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

**UN Security Council Resolution 661 (1990)** – Imposed economic sanctions on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait, leading to a decade-long embargo that had severe humanitarian consequences.

**UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea (2006-2022)** – Enforced a series of arms embargoes, trade restrictions, and financial sanctions in response to North Korea’s continued nuclear weapons programme. Despite these measures, North Korea has persisted in its weapons development.

**UN Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006)** – First round of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme, restricting nuclear-related materials and imposing asset freezes on Iranian entities.

**Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

**Targeted Sanctions Approach** – Many sanctioning bodies have moved from broad economic sanctions to targeted sanctions on key individuals and entities to reduce harm to civilians. However, enforcement remains a challenge.

**Humanitarian Exemptions** – UN sanctions often include provisions to allow humanitarian aid, but logistical and bureaucratic hurdles can limit their effectiveness. According to a 2020 UN report, only 10% of requested humanitarian exemptions in sanctioned countries were processed efficiently.

**Diplomatic Negotiations** – Some sanctions have been used as leverage in negotiations, such as the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), which saw partial sanctions relief in exchange for Iran limiting its nuclear activities. However, the deal was later abandoned by the US in 2018.

**Possible Solutions**

**Stronger Monitoring and Adjustment Mechanisms** – Regular assessments to ensure sanctions are achieving their intended goals without excessive humanitarian consequences.

**Enhanced Humanitarian Exemptions** – Streamlining aid delivery and ensuring sanctions do not obstruct essential goods reaching civilians.

**Diplomatic Engagement** – Combining sanctions with clear diplomatic strategies to provide pathways for conflict resolution rather than indefinite punishment.

**Increased Multilateral Cooperation** – Ensuring broad international support to enhance enforcement and legitimacy while preventing evasion through alternative trade partners.

**Bibliography & further reading**

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