

Iowa High School Model United Nations
Alternatives to Sanctions
Security Council
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Background

The United Nation has always been a voluntary organization whose members are free to leave. The UN has never had the authority violate the sovereignty of a member state, but they have tried to use coercion by imposing sanctions on member states, and in extreme cases, to use military force to protect the common interest. Many have questioned the usefulness of sanctions.

The first problem is cooperation. Nations can choose not to respect international sanctions and trade with a target country. Second is the question of collateral damage. Civilians are often the ones who suffer when sanctions are imposed. The elites and wealthy are able to buy the luxury goods they are used to while the rest of the population suffers as basic consumer goods and medicines become unaffordable.

What Has Been Done/Past UN Actions

The United Nations has tried “smart sanctions” that target the political elite through freezing of international bank accounts and travel bans that hinder the ability of those in power to function effectively. The United Nations has also experimented with the various forms of sanction including diplomatic, economic, and military. This has allowed them to focus the impacts of their sanctions on the portion of the government that has violated UN resolutions. All of these techniques have had some success but none has proved highly successful in achieving change on the part of the target state.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the alternatives to sanctions?
2. When is it appropriate to use coercive measures to achieve change on the part of a member state? What about a non-member state?
3. What is the right balance between national sovereignty and the common interest?
4. What responsibility does the international community have to civilians who might be affected by sanctions?
5. When is it better to use force rather than sanctions?

Consulted/Recommended Sources

UN Security Council Sanctions Committees: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/>
Effects of Sanctions: <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/MiddleEast/Iraq/Sanctions.asp>
How Smart are Smart Sanctions: <http://www.danieldrezner.com/research/smartsanctions.pdf>
"Smart" Sanctions, Dumb Politics: <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/0614-05.htm>