

Types of UN Targeted Sanctions and their Effectiveness: Research Note

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23 July 2014

Before we can discuss the relationship between types of UN targeted sanctions and their effectiveness, it is important that we describe how we analyze sanctions in general, and how we evaluate effectiveness, in particular. There are two distinctive aspects to our approach (which is derived from the Targeted Sanctions Consortium (TSC) project).

First, our core unit of analysis is **sanctions episode**. Rather than talk about sanctions country regimes as a single unit of analysis (such as the Iran or Libya sanctions), we break country sanctions regimes into discrete episodes for the analysis of sanctions effectiveness. This allows us to take account of the significant changes that have taken place within some individual country sanctions regimes, particularly those that have been in existence for long periods of time (like Somalia or Liberia). We define a new episode whenever the UN Security Council (UNSC) changes the sanctions in place (adding or suspending measures), changes the target, or changes the purpose of the sanctions. This allows us to assess the impacts of different types of sanctions over time.

Second, we do not focus only on whether the targets change their behavior, but also whether they have been constrained or signaled. We have found that most sanctions episodes include **multiple purposes** simultaneously. Hence we differentiate between the effectiveness of the sanctions to (1) coerce, (2) constrain, or (3) signal a target. When we describe aggregate results below, we combine all three (implicitly weighting each purpose equally). It is often more informative, however, to differentiate the assessments by purpose, which is what we also do in the tables included in this research note.

Sanctions effectiveness is for us a function of two variables: (1) the policy outcome, and (2) the UN sanctions contribution to that outcome. We measure policy outcome on a five-point scale (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest), and we measure sanctions contribution to that outcome on a six-point scale (again with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, but including a 0 for instances in which the sanctions contribution is negative and actually worsens the situation). We consider sanctions effective if and only if they score a 4 or 5 on policy outcome (differentiated by purpose) and a 3 or above for sanctions contribution (where there is evidence that UN sanctions reinforced other measures). The details are spelled out at the conclusion of Annex I to this research note.

The UN's use of different types of targeted sanctions

While there are exceptions, most individual types of UN targeted sanctions measures are employed in combination with other targeted sanctions measures. Out of a total of 65 sanctions episodes, only 11 employ just one type of targeted sanction. Eight apply two types of targeted sanctions. By far the most common number of different types of sanctions (accounting for 37% of the cases) applied is three. There are 24 case episodes in which three measures are applied (usually arms embargoes, travel bans and asset freezes). There are nine instances in which four measures are applied, seven in which five different types are used at the same time, and five in which a total of six different types of targeted sanctions are simultaneously imposed. In one instance (the current episode of sanctions against the DPRK), seven different types of sanctions are currently in place. On average, the UN imposes 3.2 types of sanctions per episode.

In the analysis which follows, we differentiate between arms embargoes, bans on the movement of proliferation-sensitive goods, asset freezes, travel bans, transportation restrictions, commodity bans, diplomatic measures, and financial restrictions. Arms embargoes are the most common type of targeted sanction imposed – present in 58 out of 65 episodes (or 89% of the cases). If one considers bans on proliferation sensitive goods as arms embargoes, the percentage goes up to 91%. Travel bans are the next most popular type of sanction, present in 45 cases, or 69% of the total. Asset freezes are close behind, with 42 instances or 66% of the cases. Commodity sanctions follow, appearing in 26 cases (40%), followed by transportation bans, (23%), diplomatic restrictions (15%), bans on proliferation-sensitive goods (11%), and financial restrictions (6%).

Arms embargoes

Arms embargoes are the most frequently employed type of targeted sanction, present in nearly nine out of ten cases. They are frequently employed in combination with other types of targeted sanctions, particularly individual sanctions (asset freezes and travel bans) and commodity sanctions (in conflict cases). They have also been applied alone, i.e. without any other targeted sanctions measures, in nine episodes: the DRC, former Yugoslavia, Liberia, Somalia (in two different episodes), Sudan, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Kosovo, and Rwanda. It is not unusual for an arms embargo to be imposed before any other type of sanction is introduced in later episodes, as they were in Liberia, Somalia, and the Sudan.

Travel bans

Travel bans are the most popular form of individual sanction imposed by the UNSC. They are frequently employed in combination with individual asset freezes (in 73% of the cases) and have been applied alone (without any other sanctions) in only one instance (Guinea-Bissau). Travel bans were first introduced following the imposition of arms embargoes in seven country regimes (Al Qaida/Taliban, Angola, the DRC, Iran, Liberia, Somalia, and the Sudan).

Asset freezes

Asset freezes were imposed in 42 out of a total of 65 case episodes (or 66% of the time). There are **no** instances in which an asset freeze has been applied alone (without any other targeted sanctions measures). Asset freezes are nearly always combined with arms embargoes (in 38 out of 42 case episodes, or more than 90% of the cases in which asset freezes were imposed), and as mentioned above, they often co-exist with travel bans (in 33 out of 45 case episodes). Asset freezes have preceded the imposition of travel bans in two country regimes (Al Qaida/Taliban and Iran), but have followed them in three others (Angola, Liberia, and Libya in the 1990s). Most often, they are employed simultaneously (although not always to the same individuals).

Commodity bans

When appropriate, commodity bans are employed, nearly always in situations of armed conflict (in 77% of the case episodes in which they appear). They were first employed in Haiti, but were subsequently used in Angola, the West African conflicts (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire), and more recently in Iraq and Libya. They are sometimes imposed in the first episode of a multi-episode country regime (in five out of ten country regimes), but in an equal number of multi-episode country regimes, they follow the introduction of other types of sanctions and first appear in later episodes in the same country sanctions regime.

Transportation restrictions

The most common form of transportation restriction is an aviation ban, imposed in nearly two-thirds of the cases in which transportation restrictions have been introduced. More recently, restrictions have been introduced to shipping, particularly in instances of proliferation related goods. In five of the seven multi-episode regimes in which they are applied, they appear second or later in the sequence of episodes.

Diplomatic restrictions

Diplomatic restrictions have been imposed relatively rarely, in only 10% of the cases of UN targeted sanctions. They appear to have fallen out of favor and have not been imposed since the 1990s.

Bans on proliferation sensitive goods

Proliferation-related restrictions have been imposed in two instances (on Iran and the DPRK) and only since 2006.

Financial restrictions

Financial sector restrictions have been in only four episodes (6% of the cases), twice in Libya and once each in the most recent episodes of Iran and the DPRK. In the latter cases, they tend to be restrictions specifically focused on the financing of proliferation goods. The Libyan

measures in 2011 were more extensive, targeted on the Central Bank and the Libyan Investment Authority).

Combinations of measures

There is no particular pattern of combinations of measures when only two types of targeted sanctions are imposed simultaneously. When three are imposed, however, some patterns emerge. By far the most common combination is an arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze. That combination appears in more than 50% of the instances in which three measures are imposed (or in 13 out of 25 cases). The modal form of combination in cases where four targeted measures are imposed simultaneously is an arms embargo, a travel ban, an asset freeze, and a commodity ban. This combination appears in two-thirds of the cases, or six out of nine instances in which there are four types of targeted sanction imposed in the same case episode.

Types of UN targeted sanctions and their effectiveness

If we look in more detail at the 24 unique case episodes in which UN targeted sanctions have been effective by the criteria outlined above (keeping in mind that sanctions might be effective in both constraining and signaling within the same episode, producing a total of 38 instances of effective sanctions in coercing, constraining and/or signaling), some interesting patterns emerge. Effective cases show a higher than average number of different types of sanctions employed simultaneously. The average number of different types of sanctions employed for all cases was about three (3.2), while the average for all effective sanctions cases (regardless of purpose) is closer to four, (at 3.9). This parallels one of the findings of Paul Bentall from the UK Foreign Office who argues in his chapter in our forthcoming edited volume that effectiveness is correlated with the use of a greater number of different policy instruments (including active diplomacy, referrals to legal tribunals, and threats or use of force). In fact, it is striking to note that there are **no** instances in which the use of less than three types of targeted sanctions simultaneously produced an effective outcome. When only one type of targeted sanction is imposed in isolation, such as the ten instances in which arms embargoes have been imposed without any other measures, or when a travel ban alone was imposed in Guinea-Bissau, it has **never** been effective.

Arms embargoes

Arms embargoes are present in all effective cases. Thus they appear to be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for effectiveness. As just mentioned, however, there are ten instances in which arms embargoes have been applied alone, i.e. without any other targeted sanctions measures: in the DRC, former Yugoslavia (during the Bosnia war and over Kosovo), Liberia, Somalia (in two different episodes), Sudan, Eritrea/Ethiopia, and Rwanda (also in two episodes). None of them was effective.

Travel bans

Travel bans are almost as common in effective case episodes as arms embargoes, appearing in 20 out of 22 case episodes, or more than 90% of the time. They were present in all five of the episodes in which coercion was effective, all but two of the cases of effective constraint, and all but two of the cases of effective signaling. They have been applied alone in only one instance (Guinea-Bissau), and it has been ineffective.

Asset freezes

Asset freezes have been associated with four of the five cases of effective coercion (or 80% of the total), 11 of the 16 cases of effective constraint (69%), and 12 of the 17 cases of effective signaling (or 71%). They have never been imposed alone.

Commodity bans

Commodity bans have been used in only two of the five cases of effective coercion, but are much more visible in efforts to constrain, present in 11 of the 16 cases of effective constraint (69%). They are even more prominent in instances of effective signaling, where they are present in 76% of the cases (13 out of 17 effective case episodes). They have never been applied in isolation.

Transportation bans

Transportation bans are present in only one instance of effective coercion, six cases of effective constraint, and only three episodes of effective signaling. They have never been imposed in isolation.

Diplomatic restrictions

Diplomatic restrictions were one of the set of measures suspended in the Libyan sanctions regime in the 1990s. They were applied in about a third of the effective efforts to constrain, but in less than one-sixth of the cases of effective signaling.

Combinations of measures

The number of targeted sanctions measures in place is strongly correlated with effectiveness. There are no instances of UN sanctions that are effective with fewer than three types of targeted sanction in place. The standard package of arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze is present in two-thirds of the effective cases. The addition of a commodity ban in combination with these three measures is present in less than a third of the total.

Other types of sanctions: secondary sanctions

On two occasions, the UNSC has imposed secondary sanctions on other countries, and in both instances, the sanctions have been effective in a least one of the core purposes of the measures. Secondary sanctions were imposed on Liberia over its support for the RUF in Sierra Leone (an arms embargo, travel ban, asset freeze, and commodity sanctions) and against Eritrea over its arms exports to Al Shabaab in Somalia. They are used infrequently, but are 100% effective, albeit based on a very small sample of only two country case episodes.

Conclusion

This is a lot of rich, descriptive material about types of sanctions, including the frequency with which they appear in combination with each other, and the numbers of times they are present in effective efforts to coerce, constrain, or signal a target. We have appended to this short research note a list of tables from which we derived these results. I am sure you will see things in them that we did not (or perhaps they will provoke some new questions). I should add, however, that because this is the first time I have culled through our data looking at different types of UN sanctions, I learned some new things. Although some pre-existing hunches were confirmed, there were also some surprises in the data. Let me conclude with a list of bullet points to summarize what I find some of the most interesting / salient findings.

The UN's use of different types of targeted sanctions

- Most UN targeted sanctions episodes involve a combination of different targeted sanctions measures.
- The UN imposes on average three different types of sanctions per episode.
- Arms embargoes are the most frequently employed type of targeted sanction, present in nearly nine out of ten cases.
- Travel bans are the most popular form of individual sanction imposed by the UNSC.
- There are **no** instances in which an asset freeze has been applied alone.
- Commodity bans are employed primarily in situations of armed conflict.
- The most common form of transportation restriction is an aviation ban.
- Diplomatic restrictions have been imposed relatively rarely, in only 10% of the cases.
- Financial sector restrictions are a relatively recent development.
- By far the most common combination of UN targeted sanctions is an arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze.

The effectiveness of different types of UN targeted sanctions

- Effective cases show a higher than average number of different types of sanctions employed simultaneously (four rather than three).
- When only one type of targeted sanction is imposed in isolation, it has **never** been effective.
- There are **no** instances in which the use of less than three types of targeted sanctions simultaneously produced an effective outcome.
- The standard package of arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze is present in two-thirds of the effective cases.
- Secondary sanctions on other countries are used infrequently, but are 100% effective.

Annex I: UN TARGETED SANCTIONS USE

	Travel Ban	Asset Freeze	Arms Embargo	Proliferation	Transport	Commodity	Diplomatic Sanctions	Financial Restrictions	Total
AQ/T EP1		•			•				2
AQ/T EP2		•	•		•	•	•		5
AQ/T EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
AQ/T EP4	•	•	•						3
Angola EP1			•			•			2
Angola EP2	•		•		•	•	•		5
Angola EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Angola EP4	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
CAR EP1	•	•	•						3
Côte d'Ivoire EP1	•	•	•						3
Côte d'Ivoire EP2	•	•	•						3
Côte d'Ivoire EP3	•	•	•			•			4
Côte d'Ivoire EP4	•	•	•			•			4
Côte d'Ivoire EP5	•	•	•			•			4
DPRK EP1	•	•	•	•		•			5
DPRK EP2	•	•	•	•	•	•			6
DPRK EP3	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	7
DRC EP1			•						1
DRC EP2	•	•	•						3
DRC EP3	•	•	•						3
DRC EP4	•	•	•						3
Ethiop./Eritrea EP1			•						1
FRY I EP1			•						1
FRY II EP1			•						1
Guinea-Bissau EP1	•								1
Haiti EP1		•	•			•			3
Haiti EP2 (susp.)		○	○			○			3
Haiti EP3		•	•			•			3
Iran EP1		•		•					2
Iran EP2		•	•	•					3
Iran EP3	•	•	•	•					4
Iran EP4	•	•	•	•	•			•	6
Iraq EP1		•	•			•			3
Iraq EP2		•	•			•			3
Lebanon EP1	•	•							2
Liberia EP1			•						1
Liberia EP2	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP3	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP4	•	•	•			•			4
Liberia EP5	•	•	•			•			4
Libya I EP1	•		•		•		•		4
Libya I EP2	•	•	•		•		•		5
Libya I EP3 (susp.)	○	○	○		○		○		5
Libya II EP1	•	•	•						3
Libya II EP2	•	•	•		•			•	5
Libya II EP3	•	•	•					•	4
Libya II EP4	•	•	•		•	•			5
Rwanda EP1			•						1
Rwanda EP2			•						1
Sierra Leone EP1	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP2	•		•						2
Sierra Leone EP3	•		•						2
Sierra Leone EP4	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP5	•		•			•			3
Somalia EP1			•						1
Somalia EP2			•						1
Somalia EP3	•	•	•						3
Somalia EP4	•	•	•						3
Somalia EP5	•	•	•			•			4
Sudan I EP1	•						•		2
Sudan I EP2	•				•		•		3
Sudan II EP1			•						1
Sudan II EP2	•	•	•						3
Taliban EP1	•	•	•						3
Yemen EP1	•	•							2
Total (65)	45	42	58	7	15	26	10	4	207
Total (%)	69.2%	65.6%	89.2%	10.8%	23.1%	40.0%	15.4%	6.2%	Avg. 3.2

UN TARGETED SANCTIONS USE (EFFECTIVE CASES ONLY)

	Travel Ban	Asset Freeze	Arms Embargo	Proliferation	Transport	Commodity	Diplomatic Sanctions	Financial Restrictions	Total
AQ/T EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
AQ/T EP4	•	•	•						3
Angola EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Angola EP4	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Côte d'Ivoire EP3	•	•	•			•			4
Côte d'Ivoire EP4	•	•	•			•			4
DRC EP2	•	•	•						3
DRC EP3	•	•	•						3
Haiti EP1		•	•			•			3
Haiti EP3		•	•			•			3
Liberia EP2	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP3	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP4	•	•	•			•			4
Liberia EP5	•	•	•			•			4
Libya I EP1	•		•		•		•		4
Libya I EP2	•	•	•		•		•		5
Libya I EP3 (susp.)	○	○	○		○		○		5
Libya II EP1	•	•	•						3
Libya II EP2	•	•	•		•			•	5
Libya II EP3	•	•	•					•	4
Sierra Leone EP1	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP4	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP5	•		•			•			3
Somalia EP4	•	•	•						3
Total (24)	22	18	24	0	7	14	6	2	93
Total (%)	91.7%	75.0%	100.0%	0.0%	29.2%	58.3%	25.0%	8.3%	Avg. 3.9

* Excluding the not yet coded Libya II EP4 and Yemen EP1.

UN TARGETED SANCTIONS USE (COERCION, EFFECTIVE ONLY)

	Travel Ban	Asset Freeze	Arms Embargo	Proliferation	Transport	Commodity	Diplomatic Sanctions	Financial Restrictions	Total
Côte d'Ivoire EP3	•	•	•			•			4
DRC EP2	•	•	•						3
Libya I EP3 (susp.)	○	○	○		○		○		5
Sierra Leone EP4	•		•			•			3
Somalia EP4	•	•	•						3
Total (5)	5	4	5	0	1	2	1	0	18
Total (%)	100%	80%	100%	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%	Avg.3.6

UN TARGETED SANCTIONS USE (CONSTRAINT, EFFECTIVE ONLY)

	Travel Ban	Asset Freeze	Arms Embargo	Proliferation	Transport	Commodity	Diplomatic Sanctions	Financial Restrictions	Total
AQ/T EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
AQ/T EP4	•	•	•						3
Angola EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Angola EP4	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
DRC EP3	•	•	•						3
Haiti EP1		•	•						3
Haiti EP3		•	•						3
Liberia EP2	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP3	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP4	•	•	•			•			4
Liberia EP5	•	•	•			•			4
Libya I EP1	•		•		•		•		4
Libya I EP2	•	•	•		•		•		5
Libya II EP2	•	•	•		•			•	5
Sierra Leone EP4	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP5	•		•			•			3
Total (16)	14	11	16	0	6	11	5	1	64
Total (%)	87.5%	68.8%	100.0%	0.0%	37.5%	68.8%	31.3%	6.3%	Avg. 4

UN TARGETED SANCTIONS USE (SIGNALING, EFFECTIVE ONLY)

	Travel Ban	Asset Freeze	Arms Embargo	Proliferation	Transport	Commodity	Diplomatic Sanctions	Financial Restrictions	Total
AQ/T EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Angola EP3	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Angola EP4	•	•	•		•	•	•		6
Côte d'Ivoire EP4	•	•	•			•			4
DRC EP2	•	•	•						3
Haiti EP1		•	•			•			3
Haiti EP3		•	•			•			3
Liberia EP2	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP3	•		•			•			3
Liberia EP4	•	•	•			•			4
Liberia EP5	•	•	•			•			4
Libya II EP1	•	•	•						3
Libya II EP3	•	•	•					•	4
Sierra Leone EP1	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP4	•		•			•			3
Sierra Leone EP5	•		•			•			3
Somalia EP4	•	•	•						3
Total (17)	15	12	17	0	3	13	3	1	64
Total (%)	88.2%	70.6%	100.0%	0.0%	17.6%	76.5%	17.6%	5.9%	Avg.3.8