



Mains Practice Question

Q. Assess the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a tool for achieving foreign policy objectives. (250 words)

14 Mar, 2023 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly introducing the concept of economic sanctions.
- Discuss their advantages and disadvantages.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- Economic sanctions are **measures taken by one country or a group of countries to restrict trade, investment, and financial transactions with another country** in order to achieve specific foreign policy objectives. Economic sanctions are often **used as a non-military tool to pressure targeted countries to change their policies or behavior.**
 - Sanctions can take various forms, such as trade embargoes, financial restrictions, travel bans, and arms embargoes. Economic **sanctions have been used in a number of high-profile cases, including Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela.**

Body

- **Advantages of economic sanctions:**
 - **Cost Effective:** Sanctions can be a relatively cost-effective tool compared to military action or other forms of coercion.
 - **Target a Specific Country:** sanctions can be a way of sending a signal to the targeted country that its behavior is unacceptable, and can put pressure on the government to change its policies.
 - For example, the United States imposed **economic sanctions on Iran to force it to abandon its nuclear program.** These sanctions targeted Iran's oil industry, which is a critical source of revenue for the country.
 - The sanctions had a significant impact on Iran's economy and led to negotiations that resulted in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.
 - **Provide International Support:** Sanctions can be a way of rallying international support and creating a united front against the targeted country.
 - **Avoids Collateral Damage:** Sanctions can be a way of **avoiding direct military confrontation, which can be costly and dangerous.**
 - For example, the USA and European Union imposed economic sanctions on Russia to protest its annexation of Crimea.
 - These sanctions targeted Russia's banking and energy sectors, which are critical to the country's economy. The sanctions have had a significant impact on Russia's economy.
- **Limitations of economic sanctions:**
 - **Creates Humanitarian Crisis:** Sanctions can harm innocent civilians and create a humanitarian crisis in the targeted country.

- **Harden the Stance of Targeted Government:** Sanctions can be counterproductive and can harden the resolve of the targeted government, making it less likely to change its policies.
 - For example, the **United Nations imposed economic sanctions on North Korea to pressure it to abandon its nuclear program.** These sanctions targeted North Korea's exports, particularly coal and iron ore, which are a critical source of revenue for the country.
 - The sanctions have had a limited impact on North Korea's behavior, and the country has continued to develop its nuclear program.
- **Increase the Role of Third-Party Actors:** Sanctions can be undermined by third-party actors, such as black-market traders or other countries that are willing to flout the sanctions.
- **Ineffective in Self Sustain Economy:** Sanctions can be ineffective if the targeted country has a strong economy and is able to find alternative markets and sources of funding.
- **Factors contributing to the success or failure of economic sanctions:**
 - **International support:** The level of international support for the sanctions can be a significant factor.
 - If the sanctions are supported by a large number of countries, they are more likely to be effective.
 - **Economic Strength:** the strength of the targeted country's economy can be a factor.
 - If the country has a diversified economy and can find alternative markets and sources of funding, the sanctions may be less effective.
 - **Nature of Foreign Policy Objective:** the nature of the foreign policy objective can be a factor.
 - If the objective is achievable and clearly defined, the sanctions may be more likely to succeed. However, if the objective is too broad or ambiguous, the sanctions may be less effective.

Conclusion

- Economic sanctions can be an effective tool for achieving foreign policy objectives, but their success depends on a range of factors. While there have been cases where economic sanctions have been successful, there have also been cases where they have failed or had unintended consequences.
- Policymakers should carefully consider the advantages and limitations of economic sanctions before using them as a tool of foreign policy, and should also explore alternative strategies for achieving their objectives.