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Thinking strategically about sanctions: a research agenda

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a research agenda

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Abstract

Students of sanctions tend either to use a vocabulary coming from strategic studies without recognizing all the implications of such a use or to describe strategic concepts without naming them. After having justified the relevance of a strategic analysis of sanctions by underlining their common political and coercive nature, an analysis of sanctions using strategic concepts leads to interesting findings and a research agenda proposal for broadening our understanding of the use of sanctions in world politics.

INTRODUCTION: WHY USING STRATEGIC CONCEPTS TO ANALYZE SANCTIONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM?

Most of the academic literature about sanctions has focused on specific issues, questioning whether sanctions were working or not (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott 1983; Pape 1997; Baldwin, 2000; Hovi, Huseby et al. 2005), or analyzing the unintended effects of sanctions (Mueller and Mueller 1999; Andreas 2005). But it seems that David Baldwin's call for "books on economic statecraft and politics" (Baldwin 1985, 67), based on the model of the famous Brodie's *War and Politics* (1973), has not yet been answered. This paper's goal systematizes the analysis of sanctions in the international system by using concepts coming from the field of classical strategic studies. I argue that those concepts are helpful to comprehend sanctions by providing tools for theorization and a systematic framework for analysis. Moreover, the application of some of the core findings of strategic studies may have policy implications by leading to a strong reassessment of our way of thinking about sanctions, a timely contribution as "economic sanctions (…) are becoming increasingly central to shaping twenty-first century strategic outcomes" (Taylor 2010, 9).

a) The lack of a strategic thought in the study of sanctions

By going through the academic literature about sanctions, it is striking to observe two phenomena. First, authors may use concepts developed by strategic studies without a complete recognition of their full implications or second, they can describe a concept without identifying and defining it correctly.

I will illustrate these two phenomena alternatively, my point here being that the lack of use of relevant concepts may lead to misunderstandings and, eventually, to theoretical problems.

To illustrate the first phenomena, I will pick as an example the assumed deterrent effect of sanctions.

Several authors emphasize the fact that sanctions may have a deterrent effect, or try to identify the conditions for the deterrence effect to be effective. Building on Margaret Doxey's initial thoughts about the deterrent effect of sanctions (Doxey 1972), many authors acknowledge that "the threat of sanctions is often more powerful than sanctions themselves" (Corthright and Lopez 2002, 13). Such statements are based on a counting of case studies where deterrence is supposed to have been efficient. However, looking closely at these assumptions reveals that they rely heavily on a basic rational-actor model and do not take into account how sophisticated deterrence theories have become. If the reader needs to be convinced of this assertion that the sanctions literature still relies on a simple deterrence model, he can have a look at Hovi, Huseby and Sprinz's conditions for successful sanctions: "Assuming that both sender and target behave rationally, there are three main possibilities. First, a threat of sanctions could fail because it is not deemed credible by the target. Second, the threat might fail because it is not sufficiently potent, meaning that the target considers sanctions, however regrettable their consequences, to be a lesser evil than yielding to the sender's demands. Finally, a threat of sanctions might fail because the target expects sanctions to be imposed regardless of whether it yields to the sender's demands" (Hovi, Huseby et al. 2005, 484-485). Basing the model on the assumption of both actors being rational is problematic and needs further conceptualization. Deterrence theories, as they have been developed in the field of strategic studies, may provide such concepts for the analysis of sanctions.

But the opposite phenomenon appears in the academic literature too: describing a strategic concept without naming it correctly.

To illustrate this point, I will give only one example, as the whole paper will draw parallelisms between the literature about sanctions and the strategic studies concepts and intends to show the added-value of using an appropriate vocabulary. I will just select Galtung's statement that "the central concept here is vulnerability" (Galtung 1967, 385) and remind the reader that it is very close the Clausewitzian concept of "centre of gravity".

As we can see, strategic concepts are either badly employed or simply ignored in the analysis of sanctions, which opens a huge opportunity for systematization of the analysis.

But before exploring the strategic concepts which could fit into the sanctions field, I have to justify the parallelism between the use of military force and the use of economic sanctions which could allow me to integrate concepts emanating from strategic studies.

My core argument here is that both use of military force and use of sanctions are, in their deep essence, political acts and are, in Clausewitz's famous words, "a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 87).

I will alternatively study the characteristics of war and of sanctions and identify their political nature.

b) War: a Clausewitzian perspective

According to Colin Gray, one of the most distinguished contemporary student of strategy: "as Clausewitz appreciated so clearly, politics is what war is all about" (Gray 1999, 55).

And to be sure that we understand his thought correctly, he adds: “modern strategy ultimately derives its significance from the realm of politics” (Gray 1999, 55).

This identification of war to a political act is of the greater importance.

First, it allows us to distinguish war from other forms of violence. Following Clausewitz, Hedley Bull has written that “war is organised violence carried on by political units against each other” (Bull 1977, 184). As a consequence of that perspective, if the force is not applied for political purposes, then it is not a war. It may be sport, or crime, or banditry of a kind integral to local culture, but it is not war.

Second, the political nature of war implies that there must be a control of the use of force by a political actor, usually political leaders in the case of an inter-state war. But the head of a rebellion movement, in the case of a small war for instance, is also a political actor. However, relationships between the military and political leaders are often difficult, General Vincent Desportes evocating the “natural divergences between the political and the military” (Desportes 2001, 24). But the difficult balance between the need of political control and the requirements of military efficiency does not fundamentally undermine the political nature of war. It is not because militaries are fighting with politicians that war is not a political act.

Third, the political goal has an operational effect, by giving the use of force a signification. General Desportes is extremely clear, assessing that: “above its political necessity, a clear definition of the objective is necessary to the conception of the campaign, to the convergence of efforts and, finally, to military efficiency” (Desportes 2001, 83). General Rupert Smith totally agrees with that conception, stating that: “for force to be effective the desired outcome of its use must be understood in such details that the context of its use is defined as well as the point of application” (Smith 2006 (2005), 398).

To conclude, war is by essence a political act, but this very nature is also a condition of the success of the use of force. We can now turn to the nature of sanctions.

c) Sanctions: a Clausewitzian perspective

As Baldwin states, "Clausewitz's words are as applicable to the economic sphere as to the military" (Baldwin 1985, 65). We will now try to determine why.

According to Galtung, we can define sanctions as "actions initiated by one or more international actors (the "senders") against one or more others (the "receivers") with either or both of two purposes: to punish the receivers by depriving them of some value and/or to make the receivers comply with certain norms the senders deem important" (Galtung 1967, 379). This definition sounds familiar to the readers of Clausewitz, who describes war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 75).

The two definitions are close, as they rely on the same key elements.

First, **both sanctions and war imply a dialectical relation between at least two political units.** We can once again turn to Clausewitz, who evocates "a duel on a larger scale" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 86) or to General Beaufre, who describes strategy as "the dialectic of wills using force to solve their different" (Beaufre 1998 (1963), 73), the "international actors" evocated by Galtung being obviously political units in the sense understood by Bull (see definition of war given above).

Second, **both sanctions and war are used by a political unit to force another political unit to comply with its will.** The idea of compliance is essential as it constitutes the political nature of both sanctions and war. If

this dimension is lacking, we are facing either crime or cruelty, but not a political act.

The presence of those two key elements (dialectical relation and compliance) in both war and sanctions allows us to think about sanctions like we think about war, which means by using strategic concepts.

However, before going further, it seems useful not to make sanctions equivalent to war. It is not because their common political nature allows us to think about sanctions using the same concepts as war that we should assimilate those two acts. To be clear, there is no difference in nature, but a strong difference in degree. As Tostensen and Bull emphasize, "[sanctions] may be seen as but one policy instrument on a continuum of options ranging from gentle persuasion to war" (Tostensen and Bull 2002, 399). This statement shows once again the common political nature of sanctions and war, but underlines the difference in degree between the two acts.

I will now try to systematize the thinking about sanctions by applying strategic concepts to three main issues :

- How to design sanctions?
- How are sanctions supposed to work?
- Is there a difference in nature between comprehensive and smart sanctions?

1 - How to design sanctions?

Designing sanctions evocates the establishment of a military plan. In both cases, decision-makers have to face three main issues:

- Why are we using force?
- What are the targets of the use of force?
- Are we going alone or with allies? In the last case, how could the alliance work?

We will address those three issues alternatively for the purposes of the analysis, but we have to keep in mind that decision-makers face them in the same time.

a) Why do we have to use force?

I will in this sub-section analyze the motivations for using either military or economic coercion.

It is striking to observe that Hufbauer, Schott and Elliot's "Foreign policy goals" (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliot 1983, 31), (change target policies in a relatively modest way (1), destabilize the target government (2), disrupt a minor military adventure (3), impair the military potential of the target country (4) and change target policies in a major way (5)), are very close to those of a classical military intervention which are (or should be), according to General Smith, "ameliorate, contain, deter or coerce, destroy" (Smith, 2006 (2005), 320-321). This first and preliminary observation confirms the validity of our effort to study sanctions through the glass of strategic studies, and encourages us to compare the planning of sanctions and the planning of a military operation. To summarize, both the goals of a military intervention and those of sanctions are determined by a politically entitled authority and are part of a political intercourse.

However, determining the goals of an intervention does not explain the logic of the process which leads to this intervention.

To deal with that issue, I will use the Clausewitzian concept of "rise to the extremes", which lies at the heart of Clausewitz's thought. Strategy being defined as a dialectic of the wills, "each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 77). In Clausewitz's idea, once the decision to go to war is made, the process acquires a relative and auto-sustainable autonomy.

We have here a powerful analytical tool to think the escalation of the phenomenon leading to the imposition of sanctions. We can broaden Clausewitz's concept by adopting a constructivist approach: it is the mutual interaction between the actors ("senders" and "receivers") which leads to a "sanction episode". In other terms, in could be interesting, in terms or research agenda, to adopt a constructivist perspective and try to analyze the construction of the actors' legitimacy to send sanctions. And, once the process is launched, studies of potential radicalization of the actors are needed. I am not here talking about a "path-dependency" phenomenon. Rather, using the "rise to the extremes" theory, I suggest that the beginning of sanctions imposition can have a radicalizing effect on the targeted country, but also on the sender. Having acquired its independence, the phenomenon tends to be auto-constitutive and auto-reproductive. This path of research could also have some policy implications, and it may underline the need of a greater political control of the phenomenon.

b) What are the targets?

In this sub-section, I will try to determine what should be the targets of sanctions by using strategic concepts.

To address the issue of targeting, the Clausewitzian concept of "centre of gravity" is helpful. Clausewitz describes centres of gravity as "particular factors [that] can often be decisive… One must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain centre of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 595-596). But we should keep in mind that there may be several centres of gravity at all levels of strategy. At the tactical and operational levels, candidate centres of gravity may

include certain military formations, fortifications or strategic communication lines. But at the strategic level, a political leader can be the centre of gravity, for instance. This notion is a very powerful analytical tool but raises series of questions concerning its implementation: "does the enemy actually have a centre of gravity? Can the enemy's centre of gravity be identified? […] Even if a centre of gravity has been correctly identified, is it always possible to put it under sufficient pressure?" (Lonsdale 2008, 45). Those questions underline the necessity of reliable intelligence information and the specificities of each case. There may be no "toolkit for military action" listing the enemy's centres of gravity, as the list of such centres depends on each case.

However, the notion of centre of gravity must be refined and completed by related notions. "If the *centre of gravity (CG)* is the source of moral and physical strength, of power and resistance, it owns this nature only through *critical capacities (CC)*. Critical capacities are related to *critical requirements (CR)*, which are the conditions and resources allowing the existence of the capacities. If critical requirements are particularly deficient or vulnerable to aggressions, they must be considered as *critical vulnerabilities (CV)*" (Desportes 2001, 331).

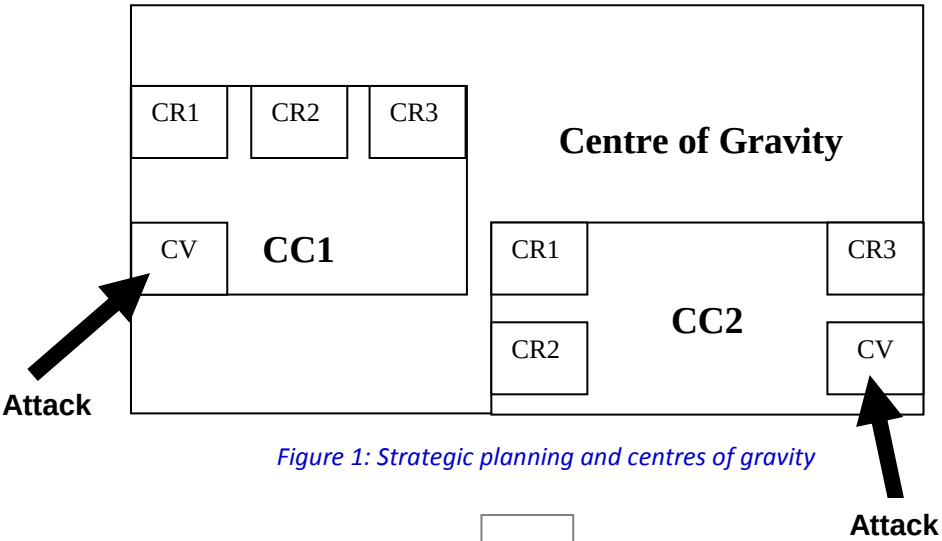

Figure 1: Strategic planning and centres of gravity

This figure helps to understand the intellectual demarche of a strategic planning. After having identified the centres of gravity, the planner has to determine its capacities and the requirements for those capacities. Once this step is done, he has to decide which requirements is the most vulnerable and attack it.

Another useful concept is the USAF Colonel John Warden's "five ring" model (Warden 1988), according to which the enemy state could be regarded as a "system of systems" –all aspects of which are equally vulnerable to air power. The five concentric rings are, from the outside to the inside, military forces, population, infrastructure, "system essentials" or key production and leadership.

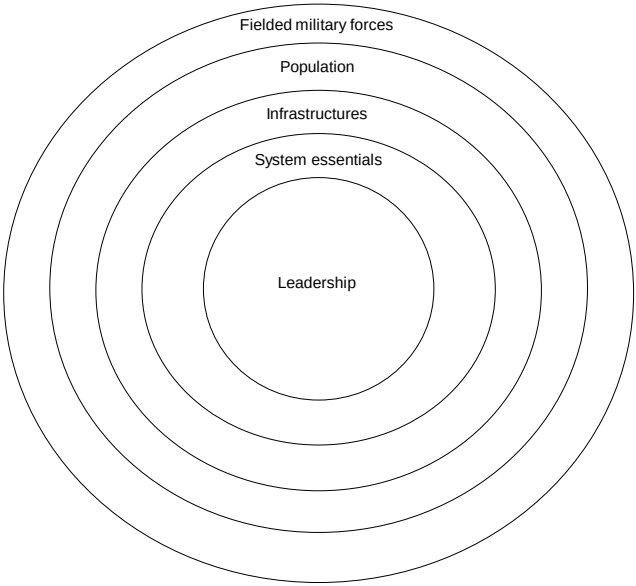

Figure 2: Warren's "five rings model"

Even if Warden's vision was designed for air power and might at first sight appear to be a mere refinement of earlier thinking, it has been at the heart of the bombing concept of the Gulf war. Even if we can argue that the five circles identified by Warden are the new names of the "centres of gravity", the main added value of his thought is the idea of interdependence between the rings: the "system of systems". While Clausewitz's conception is quite static, Warden integrates a dynamic and inter-connected notion.

Those two concepts of "centre of gravity" and of "rings" are therefore helpful to design strategic planning. To what extent are they useful to sanctions?

First of all, it is striking to observe that many students of sanction perceive the potential targets in terms close to those of Clausewitz and Warden. As Galtung states: "the crucial concept here is vulnerability" (Galtung 1967, 385), acknowledging the fact that sanctions must put pressure upon a weaker element into the targeted state's organisation. Crawford and Klotz identify four "sites for potential consequences of sanctions" inside a political system: elite decision makers, government structures, economy and civil society (Crawford and Klotz 1999, 31). It is also the logic underpinning smart sanctions: by targeting head of states, high-ranking officials and some institutions (banks for instance), the targeted state should comply more easily. However, what strategic studies teach us is that centres of gravity can be multiple and, more importantly, that the pressure must be applied upon the "crucial vulnerability". It is outside the scope of this paper to engage into a systematic review of sanctions mechanisms in order to determine whether or not they are designed in order to put pressure effectively on the "crucial vulnerability", but we can argue that strategic thinking during the phase of sanction design would likely increase their efficiency. A strategic thinking would be adequate at both levels of decision-making (resolution taken by the Security Council) and implementation by the Sanctions Committee. As the

Sanction Committee is supposed to present reports to the Security Council (Wallensteen, Staibano and Eriksson 2003, 24), it would probably be interesting, in terms of policy-making, to assess the effectiveness of sanctions using the "centres of gravity" concept. Case studies (notably the Iran case) tend to show that the design process is mostly a compromise between state's interests rather than the product of strategic thinking, as there is a disconnect between the objectives of sanctions and the extent to which theses objectives are reflected in the design of sanctions (Khalid 2009; Chesterman and Pouligny 2003).

c) Who are the senders?

By applying sanctions, sender states face a dilemma: if they send sanctions alone, how can they be sure that other states will do the same, and if they send sanctions collectively, how can they be sure that their partners will adopt an attitude as strict as theirs? The best historical example of this dilemma is given by Napoleon's attempt to make Russia comply with the "continental blockade" he was trying to impose upon Great-Britain. Napoleon attacked Russia, which led to a disaster and eventually led to his lost of power a few months later. As Colin Gray emphasizes, "allies are both a curse and a blessing" (Gray 1999; 169). We can play on words and say that in an alliance, you are fighting with your allies.

Alliances theorists have for a long time identified the difficulties of being part of an alliance: "rigidity of organization, superpower domination, lack of consultation, domestic instability among the partners, suspicion between allies, uncertainty about the status of one's allies, doubt about the exact nature of the commitments one has entered into, the existence of acrimonious sub-groups within an alliance, disagreements about issues not concerned with the alliance, and differences about the appropriate share of burdens, influence and rewards" (Booth 1987, 269). To address

those problems, the answer is invariably the same: the need of mutual trust and cohesion between allies.

The problem is today obviously demonstrated by the attempts of western countries to impose sanctions upon Iran and the unwillingness of Russia and China to be associated with such measures.

To what extent is it useful for our understanding of sanctions? First of all, it leads us to consider sending countries as being part of a "security community" (Adler and Barnett, 1998) (as they agree on the definition of a common threat) and raises the question of the constitution of such a community. A related issue to address is to explain why sending countries choose sanctions over other policy tools, or alongside other measures. Second, in terms of bureaucratic politics, it will be interesting to study the struggles between allies and their mutual concessions in the process of sanctions design.

2 - How are sanctions supposed to work?

In this section, I will address the issues of intended and unintended effects of sanctions using strategic concepts. I will address simultaneously the issues of deterrence, and the problems of implementation of sanctions.

a) Deterrence

We have already evoked above that numbers of authors writing about sanctions emphasize their deterrent effect. However, they never refer to strategic studies which have developed a very sophisticated approach to deterrence issues. The debate about deterrence has mostly focused on the question of the rationality of the actors. A rational-actor model means that for deterrence to be effective, the deterring actor seeks to prevent an

attack by threatening unacceptable damages in retaliation, so that in the challenger's costs-benefits calculations, the best choice is not an attack.

Phil Williams indentifies three core requirements of deterrence: communication, capability and credibility (Williams 1988, 119). In other words, deterrence mostly depends on adopting an adequate posture. This approach is very close to Margaret Doxey's perspective, which identifies four factors for sanctions to be efficient: communication, commitment, competence and value (Doxey 1972, 535). We have here a clear example of parallelism between the concepts, with an emphasis on communication and posture to make deterrence credible and, consequently, efficient.

This approach could have serious effects on the attitudes towards sanctions, as an effective deterrence posture would mean that sanctions should no longer be seen as a sign of weakness (imposing sanctions to "do something" without really believing in it), but as a policy tool, which supposes a dissuasive posture. Indeed, to have a deterring effect, sanctions should be conceived less as an expedient and an alternative to the use of military force when sending countries want to react to a behaviour they disapprove without taking too many risks, which undermines the deterring potential of sanctions as receiving countries can perceive it as a sign that sending countries won't go further into coercion, but rather as a policy tool on its own. Students of sanctions seem to come to similar conclusions, as some of them argue that, for sanctions having a deterrent effect, "if Sender is prepared to impose potent sanctions, then it should make this clear from the outset" (Hovi, Huseby et al. 2005, 499).

So far, we have assumed the classical rational-actor model. However, the main issue related to deterrence has been the questioning of this quite mechanical model and the step towards some sophistication. What are the consequences of such developments for the study of sanctions?

In his study about deterrence, Patrick Morgan makes clear that *for purposes of theory-building*, deterrence "was not considered as a

phenomenon in its own right to which one could apply notions of rationality to see how helpful they might be; deterrence was *conceived* in terms of actor rationality" (Morgan 2003, 44). This bias in the conception of the theory has led to various criticisms, putting into question the validity of the rational-actor model. It would be outside the scope of this essay to trace the history of the "rational deterrence debate" (Achen and Snidal 1989, Downs 1989, Lebow and Stein 1989, Krause 1999). However, we can discuss some of the core criticisms and see to what extent they challenge the deterrence theory. We will afterwards turn to the application to the field of sanctions.

As Keith Krause notices, one of the criticisms addressed to the rational deterrence theory (RDT), is that "if deterrence is understood as a relationship embedded in a historical context of interaction, RDT cannot avoid the question of the goals and purposes of particular foreign policies, which states invest great efforts in conveying to others" (Krause 1999, 141). In other words, it is impossible to predict a "rational" behaviour (which is what RDT tries to do by asserting that the challenger will choose the less costly solution) without taking into consideration the social context.

However, even if the social context makes each case unique and, as a matter of fact, undermines the possibility of creating a grand "Rational Deterrence Theory", it does not means that rational deterrence cannot be a "middle-range" theory. Actually, Patrick Morgan is right when he says that RTD rather needs more sophistication than simply be abandoned. In his words: "I stop short of dismissing rational decision approaches, but it is inappropriate to treat complaints that the behaviour assumed is often not present as irrelevant. Needed instead is a more extensive explanation, part of or auxiliary to the theory, as to why deterrence theory constructed in that fashion will be accurate anyway. This would enhance testing the theory, thereby possibly better meeting or coping with major objections by the critics" (Morgan 2003, 78-79).

Trying to define an effective deterrence attitude, Bruno Tertrais concludes that "the deterrence mechanism is weak, as it lies upon a set of hypotheses which are undermined by the weaknesses of human psychology, political organisations and crisis management procedures" (Tertrais 2009, 35). In other words, Tertrais acknowledges that actors may behave in quite different ways as a strict rational-actor model would have predicted, and he tries to find policy recommendations to deal with that issue. Tertrais concludes his analysis with seven policy recommendations:

- Knowing the specificities of the country involved
- Threaten in priority the regime's survival tools (we find once again the notion of centre of gravity)
- Do not hesitate to show determination
- Transmit a clear signal
- Leave the opponent an exit
- Envisage the "indirect deterrence"
- Invest in means to complete deterrence.

Warning us about a naïve "deterrence attitude", he concludes by saying that "these sophistications do not undermine the virtues of deterrence, which is probably the less bad of the defence systems which have been experimented throughout history". By refining the classical model, Tertrais insists, as we have previously seen, on the importance of communication and credibility for deterrence to be effective.

Another criticism addressed to deterrence theory is that in most of the cases studied, there is "the difficulty of distinguishing challenger from defender in any given case. […]. Both parties to a deterrence encounter often consider themselves to be the defender" (Lebow and Stein 1989, 221). Critics of deterrence have a point here, which may have serious theoretical implications for the study of sanctions. Consider for instance the case of targeted sanctions, designed against an individual say, for preventing him to commit a bomb attack by freezing his assets. Who is deterring who? The sanctions committee, who threats the individual

freezing his assets or the individual who threats states to commit an attack on their territories if they participate to the sanction committee? In the latest case, sanctions are no longer a deterring tool but rather a counter-reaction, a defence mechanism. In other terms, there may be cases where sanctions could no longer be seen as a coercive tool, but rather as a counter-measure to a threat.

What conclusions can be drawn from this observation? The first one is theoretical: there is the need for a reassessment of sanctions cases along two dimensions: coercive measure/counter-measure. This reassessment should be done by studying closely the cases and asking the question: who was threatening who in the first case? This reassessment could lead to a new typology of sanctions and offer interesting perspectives in the assessment of sanctions successes and failures. If sanctions were a response to a perceived threat and if that threat did not materialize, sanctions may be considered as a success. We can imagine cases acknowledged as failures (in terms of the dominant goal-seeking/compliance-seeking model) which may be reassessed as successes by taking into consideration the fact that the challenger has not been able to exert a negative action on the deterring part, even if he did not fully complied.

The second conclusion can be made in terms of policy-making. We can argue that, to avoid any ambiguity, a clear distinction must be made between the challenger and the deterring part. This implies a social construction of the role and a phrasing of the situation in terms of the “good guy”, who will use deterrence to defend widely acknowledged legitimate objectives (human rights, freedom of speech, etc.) and of the “bad guy”, the challenger. A confusion of roles would undermine the deterrent effect as both parts would tend to consider itself as the defender. We find once again here the importance of the communication factor.

A last important aspect is the issue of collective actor deterrence. In his speculative study of the theoretical implications of collective actor deterrence, Patrick Morgan identifies twelve "propositions":

- For general deterrence, collective actors need credibility more than national actors do.
- The more institutionalized the collective actor the less intrinsically serious the credibility problem.
- The viability of collective actor deterrence depends on the viability of collective actor security management.
- Collective actors will not get their own forces soon.
- A collective actor will rely on threats of defence, not (or not just) retaliation.
- Collective actors should plan to use overwhelming force to win quickly and decisively, and to settle the issue decisively, but won't do so.
- Collective actor deterrence will not be mounted in a timely fashion, nor it will be upheld immediately on being challenged.
- Collective actor deterrence does not generate the standard stability problem.
- Collective actor face graver credibility problems than state actors
- The further along a continuum from outright interstate aggression to terrorism, the harder deterrence is to operate for a collective actor.
- Great powers are immune to collective actor deterrence
- A collective actor poses sever problems for any challenger seeking to deter it (Morgan 2003, 193-200).

It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss in detail each proposition made by Morgan, but we can see that they are useful tools to comprehend sanctions. Deterrence used by collective actors, even if not fundamentally different from deterrence used by a single actor, seems to have its own rules.

To conclude this long discussion on the deterring effect of sanctions, strategic studies teach us that, for deterrence to be effective, it needs an adequate posture. This is for the policy aspect of the discussion. On a theoretical level, our discussion opens two areas of research: the reassessment of sanctions episode along the "who was threatening first?" line, and the need for further thoughts on the collective actors deterrence.

b) The problems of implementation

Implementing sanctions seems to be difficult as, once targets are designated, amounts of problems arise and unintended effects appear (Mueller and Mueller 1999, Andreas 2005, Biersteker 2010).

Some concepts can help us to think more systematically about those issues. The first concept is applicable to the planning phase: it is the "fog of war", which indicates the lack of information available for policy-makers. Clausewitz, Sun Tzu and Jomini have three different conceptions of dealing with that issue. While Clausewitz considers that the fog of war is irreducible and emphasizes the moral qualities of the military chief to deal with it, Sun Tsu insists upon the importance of intelligence. However, this opposition is too caricatured, as Clausewitz obviously acknowledges the need of intelligence (even if he thinks that it will never dissipate completely the fog of war), while Sun Tsu admits that intelligence is never a panacea. But their standpoints remain different. Jomini builds a synthesis of these two approaches, thinking that intelligence is fundamental to the military chief, but stating that the information supplied is often incomplete or outdated. In that case, it is the military leader's responsibility to consider every possible situation and to prepare adequate responses.

This concept of "fog of war" would be useful to describe the planning phase of sanctions. Policy-makers take decisions in situations of "bounded rationality". As Raymond Boudon describes it, the policy maker is "an intentional actor, having a set of preferences, looking for acceptable

means to achieve his goals, more or less conscious of the degree of control that he can have upon the elements of the situation in which he is involved, acting in function of a limited information and in a situation of uncertainty" (Boudon 1977, 14). Basically, the policy maker's rationality is bounded by three factors:

- An always imperfect information
- The impossibility to envisage all situations
- The incapacity to analyse until their last consequences the orders given.

There is no specific recommendation made to deal with the "fog of war" phenomenon, unless that of modesty and acknowledgement that decisions are made in an environment of uncertainty. But, obviously, this attitude is incompatible with more restricted political strategies, which demand certitudes and confidence.

The second useful concept could be the "friction" which is, in Clausewitz terms, "the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 119). Friction is the accumulation of unintended problems: "countless minor incidents – the kind you can never foresee – combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal" (Clausewitz 1984 (1832), 119). Friction can occur for several reasons, but its main sources are:

- uncertainty
- moral factors
- interaction with an intelligent foe.

This last factor is the most important one, as several authors in the field of sanctions have noted that targeted states develop strategies to circumvent the effect of sanctions. For instance, in Galtung's words, there are three main strategies for receiving countries to deal with sanctions:

"adaptation to sacrifice, restructuring the economy to absorb the shock, and smuggling" (Galtung 1967, 393). For his part, Drezner states that "even if the sanctions become smarter, so will the targets" (Drezner 2003, 109). Those statements confirm Churchill's wise observation that: "however sure you are that you can easily win, there would be no war if the other man did not think he also had a chance" (Churchill 1959 (1930), 158). This could be adapted to "however sure you are that you can easily impose your will, there would be no sanctions if the other man did not think he had a chance to support them".

In his detailed study of the friction phenomenon, Stephen Cimbala identifies three levels in which friction can occur:

- "Friction in the formulation or explication of goals and objectives
- Friction in the means and methods for achieving the given goals, including plans, strategies, operations, and tactics in the case of military matters
- Friction in the role expectations and perceptions of individual political and military leaders, including personality traits and decision styles that may be helpful or not, given the required mission" (Cimbal a 2001, 201).

To deal with friction, all military writers emphasize the need of both reactivity and adaptation, which would mean that sanctions, to be effective, should be submitted to a constant revision process, obviously difficult to establish.

The acknowledgement of both fog of war and friction in the design and implementation of sanctions could lead to interesting process-tracing studies which could be fruitful for our understanding of sanctions.

3 - Are comprehensive and targeted sanctions different in nature?

Most of the literature about sanctions doesn't recognize a difference in nature between comprehensive and targeted sanctions. Until now, the debate has focused on trying to determine whether targeted sanctions were "smart" or not (Tostensen and Bull 2002, Drezner 2003), but we still need a conceptualization of targeted sanctions. I here argue that using the distinction made between global and limited war can be fruitful.

a) What is a limited war and to what extent does it compare to targeted sanctions?

The concept of limited war emerged in the American strategic debate during the late 1950's (and prolonged during the 1960's) as an attempt to answer a very simple question: "if we have to go to war, how can we prevent it to escalate to a nuclear exchange?". As John Garnett notices: "limited-war strategies were advanced as a response to two quite different pressures. First, they developed because if deterrence failed people wanted an alternative to annihilation; second they developed because many believed that the ability to wage limited war actually enhanced deterrence" (Garnett 1988, 190). As we can see, limited-war theories are deeply embedded in the fear of the consequences of total war in the nuclear era and were trying to limit such consequences. Limited war can be "generally conceived to be a war fought for ends far short of the complete subordination of one state's will to another's, and by means involving far less than the total military resources of the belligerents, leaving the civilian life and the armed forces of the belligerents largely intact and leading to a bargained termination" (Osgood 1969, 41). We can identify here several characteristics of limited wars:

- Geographical limitation
- Limited objectives
- Limited means
- Limited targets.

It is striking to observe that those four characteristics are advanced by scholars studying targeted sanctions as constitutive of the "smartness" of sanctions. For instance, smart sanctions can be defined as "measures that are tailored to maximize the target regime's cost of noncompliance while minimizing the target population's suffering" (Drezner 2003, 107). In other words, their goal is to "enhance the effectiveness of sanctions regimes by applying maximum pressure on the culpable actor while at the same time minimizing the adverse humanitarian impact (euphemistically referred to as "collateral damage") on innocent internal groups as well as on neighbouring states" (Tostensen and Bull 2002, 380). We can find in those two definitions the same criteria as those constitutive of limited wars.

Even the intellectual process which led to targeted sanctions is close to the process which led to the theorization of limited war. While the move to targeted sanctions was made because of the "shadow of Iraq" (sanctions imposed against that country led to many civilian casualties), the whole reflexion about limited war was conducted in order to avoid a total war which could result in a humanitarian disaster due to a nuclear exchange.

If the characteristics of targeted sanctions are the same as those of limited war, we are entitled to think about them using the same concepts. I argue here that the literature about targeted sanctions can fruitfully exploit the findings of the rather sophisticated debate about limited war to conceptualize a difference between targeted and comprehensive sanctions.

In his work, Clausewitz defines two "ideal-types" of war: the total war and the limited war, which constitutes the two opposites of a continuum. While the objective of the total war is the destruction of the enemy as a political entity, the objective of the limited war is the creation of a new equilibrium between the two parties.

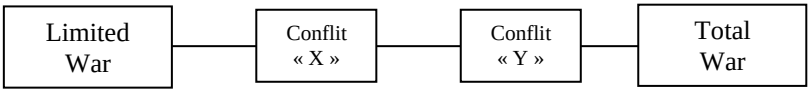

Figure 3: The "limited war/total war" continuum

Between those two extremes, there is a large scale on which conflicts are situated. In that sense, "the idea of a continuum reinforces the thesis of the political nature of war […]. The violence, which is more or less restrained, is the expression of the political goal, which is more or less large" (Desportes 2001, 141). There is here an interesting idea for the conceptualization of sanctions. We may argue that comprehensive sanctions are used to serve larger political objectives and that targeted sanctions are, or should be, limited to minor political objectives. Some critics may argue that the parallelism between comprehensive sanctions and total war is not relevant, as the objective of comprehensive sanctions is not the destruction of the other political entity. However, I argue that comprehensive sanctions, as they restrain the freedom of action of the targeted state and limit its sovereignty, are also a destruction of a political unit's autonomy. This conceptualization requires to give up the opposition between the so-called "smart" sanctions and the assumed "dumb" sanctions (which presupposes that the former are a refinement of the latter but does not makes any difference in nature between them) and rather conceptualize targeted and comprehensive sanctions as being two "ideal-types" of sanctions located at the extreme opposites of a continuum and analyze each sanction episode as being more or less "targeted" and more or less "comprehensive".

b) The difficulties of limited war

There are several difficulties to lead a limited war.

The first difficulty is to know when to stop the war. Initial successes may give too much confidence to military and political leaders and encourage them to continue the war, which would no longer be "limited". The difficulty here is the appraisal of the costs in comparison to the benefits expected. The second difficulty is to refrain to use all means at disposal to defeat the opponent. One of the characteristics of war is its temptation to quickly go to the extremes, and self-restrain in the use of the means is often difficult. The third difficulty is that limited wars are often limited for one of the two belligerents only. The problem here is that "the value of the political ends at stake can be limited for one of the actors involved – which will accordingly adopt a limited strategy – while it can be absolute for the other actor, which will naturally follow the logic of a total war" (Desportes 2001, 155). In other words, the "limited" character of war depends on the other actor's good will. This observation leads to a very simple conclusion, well expressed by General Chilcoat: "if centres of gravity, the most vital military targets, lie beyond the political constraints imposed by the nation's leadership, military intervention is unlikely to succeed" (Chilcoat 1995).

What do those observations teach us for the study of sanctions? First of all, it is striking to observe that sanctions which were, at the beginning, supposed to be "smart" and targeted, turn out to affect much more people than expected. This is the case in Iran, where the targeting of Iranian banks affects their customers without making the regime comply (Tsvetkova, 2009). This fact illustrates the tendency of limited actions to turn "global". But, most importantly, it is the inadequacy between means and ends which can be troubling. If we assume a strategic logic and that targeted sanctions are badly designed (which means, if they don't target the targeted state's "centres of gravity"), they may just be useless. Said in a different way, targeted sanctions may well be under-efficient against a motivated

challenger. In that case, it may be useful to turn to a higher degree, towards more “comprehensiveness” of sanctions.

To summarize, the parallelism between smart sanctions and limited war leads to interesting conclusions. First, it forces us to abandon the opposition between targeted sanctions and smart sanctions, but rather to consider them as degrees on a scale going from “purely targeted” to “purely comprehensive” sanctions. This finding has a policy implication, as targeted sanctions usually tend to be considered as the tool allowing the sender to obtain a political gain without any collateral damage. First, it opens the door for further studies on the link between the relative power of sending countries and the choice between targeted-like and comprehensive-like sanctions. Moreover, I argue that we should rather consider targeted sanctions as fitted to limited objectives, and the comprehensiveness should grow accordingly to the growth of the expected political gain or the targeted country’s resistance. Obviously, this increase of sanction will lead to civilian casualties, like in war. The sending country has to find the balance between the expected political gain and the amount of suffering it is ready to impose to the targeted state’s population. I am aware that the argument here is probably not “politically correct”, but I argue that the assumption of a continuum from targeted sanctions to comprehensive sanctions has two advantages:

- It avoids the angelic and intellectually dangerous view of targeted sanctions as the miraculous tool allowing policy-makers to gain a political advantage without collateral damages.
- Consequently, it gives policy-makers a larger range of options in the design of sanctions and opens the door for flexibility and adaptation (by increasing or decreasing the degree of sanctions).

CONCLUSION

This paper's goal was to try to determine some axis for further research in the field of sanctions by showing that a strategic perspective was fruitful. I will now summarize my main findings.

First of all, we have identified the utility of a constructivist perspective to study the beginning and the prolongation of a sanction episode ("rise to the extremes" and "security communities"). But this perspective is also useful for further studies of the deterring effect of sanctions. A process-tracing and bureaucratic analysis could also enhance our understanding of a sanction episode, especially for the design (bureaucratic politics) and the implementation of sanctions (process-tracing useful for the study of "friction"). A purely strategic perspective is useful for analyzing the targets of sanctions and determine whether or not they are targeting the proper "centres of gravity". Finally, making a parallelism between small wars and targeted sanctions, I suggest to abandon the opposition between targeted and comprehensive sanctions, and rather to consider them as the two opposite poles of a continuum.

These few lines of research may be promising as they would probably help a better understanding of the sanction phenomenon, and may lead to a reassessment of the policy-making phase.

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Thinking strategically about sanctions: a research agenda

Students of sanctions tend either to use a vocabulary coming from strategic studies without recognizing all the implications of such a use or to describe strategic concepts without naming them. After having justified the relevance of a strategic analysis of sanctions by underlining their common political and coercive nature, an analysis of sanctions using strategic concepts leads to interesting findings and a research agenda proposal for broadening our understanding of the use of sanctions in world politics.

Olivier Schmitt

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