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Reflections on the Debate of Sanctioning Russia

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On February 21, 2022 Vladimir Putin deployed troops into the Donbas region of Ukraine and recognized the independence of two republics in the region. The Biden administration was prompt to announce a first tranche of sanctions, modeled on those implemented after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. These included restriction on investment in exports and imports from the separatist regions as well as blocking sanctions placed on certain individuals in the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. On February 24, the United States announced a second round of sanction which is even stronger package in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Implemented "in tandem with partners and allies," these sanctions targeted high-ranking Russian officials and their families, state-owned enterprises, and Russia's financial sector including its two largest commercial banks. The measures are the toughest since those imposed on Iran in 2010 and North Korea in 2013.

The conflict in Ukraine is viewed as part of renewal geopolitical rivalry between western powers and Russia. United States is trying to consolidate its unipolar position in the world. As part of the plan, it breached the Minsk Agreement 1991 which prohibits USA to march forward on the Eastern sides of Europe. However, due to NATO's eastward expansion, Vladimir Putin was deeply concern for Russia's security that it will be encircled by the west. The purpose of NATO's eastward expansion was to reduce the influence of Russia in East Europe. When Volodymyr Zelenskyy refused to negotiate with Mr. Putin, he decided to attack on Ukraine to bring Zelenskyy in the negotiation table. The immediate reactions of USA and EU was to impose heavy sanctions on Russia, restricts it from global banks and SWIFT system. However, economic sanctions are widely used but their effectiveness is often questioned.

Responses on the Sanctions

The European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have all

announced their own sanctions and export controls. The third tranche of sanctions bans some Russian banks from SWIFT (the financial messaging system), sanctioned the Russian central bank. However, there are countries like Turkey, which imports a third of its natural gas from Russia, has been reluctant to implement sanctions. However, Brazil voted on February 25 for the UN resolution "deploring" the Russian invasion, President Bolsonaro has said that Brazil will stay neutral in the conflict. India, with its long-standing ties to Russia, has sought to carve out a neutral position. Most importantly, Beijing has emphasized the importance of "territorial integrity but acknowledged Russian legitimate security concerns regarding NATO's eastward expansion. The United States, as the world's largest energy producer, is somewhat insulated, but Europe is vulnerable, as Russia provides a quarter of Europe's oil imports and 40 percent of its natural gas. Without Russian pipeline gas, Europe would struggle to obtain enough liquefied natural gas (LNG) by sea because leading exporters—the United States, Australia, and Qatar—are already shipping at or near full capacity. Europe would have to make up the difference by reducing gas consumption or bidding up the limited supply of LNG on the market. Russia and Ukraine are also major grain producers. Over the past week, Western countries have ramped up myriad sanctions against Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine.

Sanction Regime and Its Paradox

The inevitable debate of supporting the sanction or not lie in its purpose. The purpose of the sanction is not humanitarian rather it is political. One of the prominent scholars of International Relations, Hans J Morgenthau rightfully pointed out that power is meaningless when it is not applicable. Hence, the western powers impose sanctions to consolidate their position and it is the reflection of their superiority. The United States imposed sanction on Iran and North Korea previously to fulfill their strategic objectives. However, being a repressive nation and human rights violator, Myanmar faced

lesser volume of sanctions compared to others for committing genocide. Western allies in Asia like Japan, Singapore, South Korea not only abstain from condemning Myanmar but also turn a blind eye to the worst humanitarian Rohingya refugee crisis. Myanmar is a geopolitical hotspot for Indo-Pacific strategy promoted by West and it is also rich in natural gas and oil. Hence, the western power's humanity is only confined to the few countries that are assumed as potential threats for western hegemony.

Moreover, United States never faces any sanctions neither from its European allies or any countries for violating the human rights in Iraq and Afghanistan or Syria. Therefore, any western invasion is always perceived as the war against terror or their responsibility to protect the democracy, stability and peace of the world. The paradox regarding the sanction is Western powers are constantly violating the human rights, regime change in the name of establishing democracy but they are the one who impose sanctions on others as the defender of human rights. They do not have any moral obligations to impose sanctions on any others. Therefore, it is clear that sanction is their strategies to counter balance their potential threats who challenge the unipolar world order. Moreover, the sanction does not change the behavior of particular state. America imposed sanction on Russia in 1980 which couldn't change the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Besides, United States has selectively imposed on those products like electronics, oil and gas, and hardwares in which Russia is their competitor in the market. Hence, the underlying cause of imposing sanctions on Russia is not humanitarian rather is to isolate Russia from International market, destroy the backbone Russian economy, counter balance Russia in Eastern Europe etc.

However, the economic and geopolitical repercussions of Ukraine crisis would be severe for developing countries specially those who are dependent on the Russia due to its size, degree of integration with the global markets and energy production. Russia contributes 13 percent of global crude oil providing roughly 10 barrels which is even

twice than OPEC. The war will inflate the prices of global crude oil. Since December, oil prices have risen more than 40 percent. The closing of the SWIFT system could decrease the import and export from Russia. Russia also export grains at a cheaper price to Asia and Africa which will result in price hike in food market.



Moreover, Russian total FDI abroad expanded by US \$20.2 bn in September 2021 with a growth of \$8.9 b. Many Asian and African countries are the receivers of FDI and aid but due to this conflict, FDI and foreign assistance may decline to a greater level. Moreover, with the economic changes, the developing powers have to look for new developing partners which may push them into dilemma of choosing sides between great powers. Due to the crisis in global economy, the global attention will be shifted from nontraditional security threats like Rohingya Crisis or Syrian Refugee Crisis and climate changes. Budget for the climate change or refugees will be cut down to maintain the global economy. Therefore, the developing countries will be the worst sufferers of the disruption caused by economic sanctions. To conclude, sanction as a political weapon serves the purpose of the western power which won't bring any changes in Russian policies rather it will result in the economic and strategic disruptions of developing countries.



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