
THE ECONOMICAL IMPACT OF UNITED NATIONS SANCTIONS ON IRAQ (1990–2003)

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Introduction:

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II. United Nation serves as a principle international organization tasked with maintaining global peace, security, and cooperation among states. For the implementation of the global peace and security the United Nation uses one of the most important tools known as “sanctions”. As per the Article 41 of United Nation Charter the Security Council may invoke non-military measures to enforce its decisions, which include interrupting economic, transport, and communication links, as well as breaking diplomatic relations. Till now there are many countries and individuals on which the different types of sanctions were imposed. Some of the sanctions have been successfully achieved their goals and many are failed due to many reasons.

One of the most controversial and landmark case of sanction is of the Iraq (1990). In this case, Iraq has faced many serious problems like economic collapse, humanitarian crises, international isolation and many more. Although, the objective of sanctions were successful in the eyes of United Nation but for the Iraqis it was more dangerous than the sanctions. It is one of the landmark case that developed the concept of imposition of sanctions. In this assignment it is going to be discuss about the effectiveness of sanction in the case of Iraq (1990) on the both (paper as well as the ground) levels.

Reasons for tension between Iraq and Kuwait:

After the Iran-Iraq war lasted for nearly eight years. Due to this war the financial condition of the Iraq was very bad and there were many loans were taken from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other gulf States by Iraq during the time of Iran-Iraq war. At this time there was the regime of Saddam Hussain and he argued that:

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1. Kuwait and UAE should consider the loans as payments to Iraq for the protecting the Arabian Peninsula from the Iranian expansionism, but they refused to forgive the debt.
2. Accused Kuwait for over producing crude oil for export and depressing prices and also alleged that Kuwait was slant drilling of crude oil from the oil reserve of Iraq.

These were these 2 main reasons that increases the tension between Iraq and Kuwait.

Iraq invasion of Kuwait:

The tension between Iraq-Kuwait was increasing, as a result on 2 August 1990 Iraq entered in the territory of Kuwait with military forces and within 2 days of invasion Iraq captured Kuwait. UN passed a resolution 660² on 2 August 1990 and as per the resolution, this was a clear violation of international law and direct threat to peace and security in the Middle East region. The UN Security Council considered this act a breach of international peace and security and UN demanded Iraq to pull back all its military forces. Iraq ignored the UN resolution 660 and didn't withdraw its forces, in response to this the UN passed another resolution 661³ on 6 August 1990. As per the resolution 661 there were some strict economic sanctions were imposed by the United Nation Security Council:

1. Trade Ban: All the countries were forbidden from buying any goods or products coming from Iraq or Kuwait, as well as no country was allowed to sell or supply and products or goods to Iraq, including weapons and military equipment. The only exceptions allowed were medicines for strictly medical purpose, and in humanitarian situations, and food supplies.
2. Freeze of Financial Assets: No country was allowed to provide any financial resources to Iraqi Government or to any business in Iraq or Kuwait.
3. Shipping and Trade Promotion Ban: Countries were also forbidden from allowing their ships or citizens to help transport or promote any trade involving Iraqi or Kuwaiti goods. Transferring funds related to such trade was strictly prohibited.
4. Monitoring Committee: The UN also set up a special committee made up of all

² UN Security Council, SC Res 660, SCOR, UN Doc S/Res/660 (Aug 2, 1990).

³ UN Security Council, SC Res 661, SCOR, UN Doc S/Res/661 (Aug 6, 1990).

Security Council members to monitor whether countries are following these sanctions properly.

5. Protection of Kuwait: The resolution clarified that these sanctions did not stop assistance from being given to the legitimate government of Kuwait. Countries were also asked to protect the assets of Kuwait and to refuse recognition of any government set up by Iraq.

All these sanctions were among the most comprehensive ever imposed by United Nations at that time. Instead of withdrawing the military forces of Iraq and complying with the resolution 661,

Iraq completely defied the UN demands as mentioned in resolution 661 and declared Kuwait as 19th Province of Iraq.

There were many resolutions passed by UN Security Council against Iraq, to leave the Kuwait land but the Iraq refused to comply. Finally on 29 November 1990, the UN Security Council passed resolution 678⁴, giving Iraq last chance to avoid military forces consequences and demanded that Iraq to fully comply with all the previous resolution. UN authorized member stated to cooperate with the Kuwait to use “all necessary means” if Iraq failed to comply by the deadline of 15 January 1991. Here, “all necessary means” means use of military forces. Iraq rejected the ultimatum and didn’t left Kuwait. In response, there was the use of military forces to send back Iraqi military from the land of Kuwait. The war lasted approximately 42 days and as a result Iraq left Kuwait.

On 3 April 1991 the UN passed resolution 687⁵ and named it “The Mother of All Resolutions”. Iraq formally accepted the terms and the war officially ended. The UN imposed extraordinarily harsh conditions on Iraq, the most important condition was to the destruction and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction and also Iraq is financial liable to compensate the damages due to Iraq invasion to Kuwait.

The continuation of sanctions after the ceasefire:

There were many reasons for which the sanctions against Iraq were continued after the formal

⁴ UN Security Council, SC Res 678, SCOR, UN Doc S/Res/678 (Nov 29, 1990).

⁵ UN Security Council, SC Res 687, SCOR, UN Doc S/Res/687 (Apr 03, 1991).

ceasefire with Kuwait in 1991. The main reasons behind the sanctions are:

1. To destroy the Weapon of Mass Destruction: This is the primary reason for the extension of sanction. This meant that Iraq has to dismantle all its chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs and it also included long-range ballistic missiles.
2. Persistent Noncompliance: Iraq repeatedly obstructed UN weapons inspectors and did not provide full report on its weapons capabilities.
3. Iraq responsibilities towards the compensation: Iraq was required to pay compensation for war damages, environmental destruction and losses caused by its occupation of Kuwait.
4. Return of Kuwaiti property and nations: Iraq was responsible to return the stolen property and also to cooperate in accounting for missing Kuwaiti citizens.
5. Desire for regime change: The UN desired to remove Saddam Hussein from power because as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power, Iraq was a threat to regional peace and security.

These all sanctions were comprehensive not an individual, that means not only an individual but the whole nation has to pay the price whatever destructions had been done by the decision taken by the leader (Saddam Hussein). These sanctions were lasted for 13 years that directly impacted the citizens specially the children of Iraq.

The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq:

1. The Number of Deaths: The most shocking and widely debated consequences of the sanctions was the extraordinary number of civilian deaths particularly the children that were the results to the combined effects of economic collapse, failure of healthcare system, and infrastructure destruction. As per Denis J. Halliday in his article “The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq” stated that “The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF acknowledge that the death rate (directly attributable to the impact of sanctions) of Iraqi children under five ranges from 5,000 to 7,000 per month.”⁶ Many deaths were often not registered immediately.

⁶ Denis J. Halliday, “The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq” 28 *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (1999).

2. The Inadequacy of the Oil-for-Food Program: The UN Security Council in its resolution 986⁷ in 1995 introduced “Oil-for-Food Program” which permitted Iraq to sell oil for food, medicine, and humanitarian needs to mitigate the impact of international sanctions on civilians. The provisions of basic foodstuffs and medicines have not been sufficient to make a effective impact on levels of malnutrition. Denis J. Halliday stated “Malnutrition levels for children under five years have remained at approximately 30 percent-of which about 25 percent is chronic-for several years despite the expenditures by the government on foodstuffs and basic medicines under the Oil-for-Food Program.”⁸
3. The collapse of Iraq’s economy: There was almost the complete destruction of the formal economy of Iraq. The economic isolation resulted the hyperinflation and a massive devaluation of the national currency.
4. Restriction of Oil Export: Oil export is the Iraq’s primary source of revenue, the export of oil was restricted to very small quantity because of imports of only necessary food and medicines as per Oil-for-Food Program.
5. Violation of Human Rights: These comprehensive sanctions violated many human rights of the citizens of Iraq such as Right to Life and Health, Right to Food and Nutrition, Right to water and Sanitation and Education and many more.

These were the major impacts of the UN sanctions on Iraq. These sanctions broke the backbone of Iraq’s economy that directly affected the citizens of Iraq. Wrong decisions made by the leaders of Iraq as well as the UN, crushed the innocent civilians of Iraq. These all were the results of the comprehensive sanctions.

Introduction to the Targeted Sanctions (Smart Sanctions):

Iraq was one of the most accurate examples of the Comprehensive Sanction. As I have discussed in my work about the consequences of the comprehensive sanctions with reference to the case of Iraq. Iraq case was the turning point for the evolution of targeted sanction because targeted sanctions are designed to put maximum pressure on the specific decision-maker and

⁷ UN Security Council, SC Res 986, SCOR, UN Doc S/Res/986 (Apr 14, 1995).

⁸ Denis J. Halliday, “The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq” 28 *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32 (1999).

excluding the innocent citizens that minimize the collateral damage to the general civilian population and the national economy. Some of the smart sanctions include:

1. Asset Freezes: Blocking the foreign bank account and financial assets of specific individuals.
2. Travel Bans: Prohibiting designated individuals from entering to other countries. (for example: Putin)
3. Arms Embargoes: Stopping the flow of weapons and military technology to specific groups rather than a total trade ban. (example: Al-Qaeda).

Conclusion:

Iraq is a clear example of how a nation can be devastated by the impositions of sanctions. This case also shows how sanctions without proper calculations or understanding their consequences, can crush a nation. Furthermore, this case also tells us that how the decision of the leader of any nation can totally destroy the nation. These sanctions set Iraq back by a few decades, which directly not only restricting the development but also destroying the progress that had achieved by Iraq before the sanctions. These comprehensive sanctions violated many human rights of the citizens of Iraq (discussed above) and the Human Rights Council must take this case seriously. The sanctions changed the economy of the middle-east. Although the result of the sanctions against Iraq was positive in the eyes of the UN and the western countries but when it comes to the ground reality of Iraqi citizens it is totally different. People have different opinions regarding this case: some support the UN and some stands with Iraq. After analyzing this issue one can form their own opinion.