[Tamseel Aqdas](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/tamseel-aqdas)

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**Sanctions in the contemporary cold war**

From 1947 till 1991, the world experienced the ‘cold war’. Under this notion, states were apportioned into two distinct categories in accordance with their social and economic ideological inclinations.

On the one hand, the Nato bloc headed by the US contended with free-market capitalism by way of profit production advancements, enhancement of human happiness and political freedom. Conversely, the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union reasoned with socialism based on its establishment of economic security. This ideological cold war ended amid the fall of the Soviet Union, subsequent to the Afghan war. Thereby, the US was affirmed as the hegemon of the newly derived unilateral international system.

In these contemporary times, the ascent of China and Russia directly counters the influence of the US, resulting in the generation of an evolved ideological cold war, whereby emphasis is laid on the organization of the international system of states. On one front, the US and Nato adhere to the rules-based international order, while China and Russia abide by the international law system. Through this, each state is entitled to exclusive territorial sovereignty and restriction from external intervention.

The rules-based international order is an accumulation of international law, norms and institutions; rules constructed on the advancement of human rights and democracy are established. The application of this was witnessed under the US intervention in Iraq and Syria, since it was justified on the grounds of human rights violations. Nevertheless, a closer look discloses the hypocrisy and selective implementation of human rights and democratic norms. It is argued that rules are generated in accordance with Nato’s interests, and human rights are unassumingly employed as a tool for intervention in sovereign states. Through this, states are compelled into following the lines of Nato’s interests plus the US’s hegemonic status, and states that compel intervention to uphold sovereignty are sanctioned.

Economic sanctions are commercial and financial penalties, which prohibit the participation of targeted states in the international economy. Under the rule-based international order, numerous countries have been sanctioned as per the realm of violating human rights, threatening regional security, and endorsing authoritarian regimes. To begin, the Trump administration sanctioned Iran for illegitimate nuclear activities. Seemingly the nuclear programme threatened the security of the region, whilst labeling Iran as an imprudent state. Similarly, the Republic of Turkey was sanctioned following the purchase of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system, which superficially threatened the Euro-Atlantic alliance. Furthermore, latterly China and Russia experienced sanctions on the basis of the Uighur issue and prohibiting LGBTQ rights in Chechnya.

While apparently sanctions target states in violation of human rights, democracy, and security, further insight reveals a different reality. The states sanctioned carry the capabilities of challenging US hegemony and Nato’s interests across their regions. Thus, sanctions are incorporated to negatively impact the economies and contain the rising influence of Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and additional affiliated states. This narrative is additionally verified through the selective nature of sanctions. States contributing to the interests of Nato and the US are not sanctioned, despite their continuous human rights abuses, anti-democratic norms, and contribution of regional instability.

For instance, some Middle Eastern states remain unsanctioned despite conducting war crimes in Yemen, imprisoning human rights activists etc. The reason behind the lack of action lies in their global oil contribution and stance against Iran. Adding on, Egypt is deemed autocratic under Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, with several cases of human rights abuse such as forced disappearances and unlawful killings. Yet, the US annually provides the state with billions of dollars in military aid, in order to obtain access to Egypt’s economically significant Suez Canal. Moreover, India’s brutal lockdown in Kashmir along with mass killings, enforced disappearances, cases of torture, and sexual abuse have become a human rights catastrophe.

Israeli war crimes and forced migration in Palestine tell a similar story. Yet, both India and Israel remain unsanctioned due to their weightage in the global economy. Demonstrating that in the context of the rules-based international order, the US and Nato generate rules grounded on their interests and transgress according to their advantage.

The employment of sanctions as a tool to attain interests can be further elaborated through understanding the US sanctions against ICC officials, which were a consequence of the investigation of US war crimes in Afghanistan. Accordingly, an order regarding blocking the American property and assets of officials involved in the probe was issued by Trump. As a consequence, the investigation was halted, and military personnel involved in war crimes remained unconvicted.

On a different note, the rules-based international order ideology directly counters that of China and Russia. There is an emphasis on international law, whereby sovereignty is promoted and amalgamation of sanctions as a political tool are sidestepped altogether. In fact, strides in favor of unilateral sanction victims are conducted.

For instance, upon the imposition of US sanctions on Iran, the Russian Federation resumed crude oil trade with Iran and sold it to countries in the third world. The sanctions enforced on Venezuela led to a crippling economy, and amid the challenging times, China and Russia provided the state with food and medicine. Russian oil companies also facilitated by marketing Venezuela’s crude oil, while China assisted by importing it. These actions demonstrate the Chinese and Russian drive for establishing sovereignty and internal integrity for states in the international system.

The divergent ideological approaches for the international system can be further highlighted through the actions associated with the military coup in Myanmar. During the debate conducted in the UN Security Council, officials from the US and UK demonstrated ambitions to exercise the situation against China. Taking the Myanmar-China trade relations into account, the US and UK pushed for the implementation of sanctions against the Myanmar military coup. The delegates from China and Russia argued that emphasis should be laid on the condemnation of violence against peaceful protesters, along with the encouragement of democratic modifications. Henceforth, the Chinese and Russian bloc pushes for the implementation of the principles of international law, and refrains from the enactment of unilateral sanctions.

It can principally be acknowledged that the US and its Nato allies have maintained dominance through the implementation of sanctions. Nevertheless, the evolving ideological cold-war against China and Russia has resulted in a power struggle that deems to target the efficacy of sanctions. The launch of China’s digital yuan directly challenges the US dollar in the international market and the significance of US-imposed sanctions, since cross-border transactions in sanctioned states can occur via the digital yuan.

Furthermore, with aspirations to upend the US-dominated international system, Russia has generated an alternate for the US based SWIFT for worldwide financial telecommunication. Accordingly, a network for inter-country transitions shall be achievable despite the imposition of sanctions. Will the declining influence of sanctions cause the US to lose the contemporary ideological cold war?

The writer is an undergraduate student of Peace and Conflict Studies at the National

Defence University, Islamabad.