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Country: Myanmar

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Topic: Assessing the Effectiveness of Sanctions

*‘It is natural that every country has to take care of its interests, but there are some interests that are common to all countries. There are human interests . . . [needing] international cooperation.* ***We’ve sometimes confused it with dictation.****’*

*-George Soros, Hungarian-American philanthropist*

Sanctions, a key diplomatic tool, are measures used by nations or international bodies to enforce norms, change behavior, or achieve policy aims, targeting individuals, entities, etc. While their aim is compliance, they may have unintended consequences such as humanitarian impacts or increased tensions. UN sanctions have become more ‘targeted’ (holding the particular perpetrators responsible) over time, and are never applied in isolation. They are accompanied by diplomatic and mediation efforts (97%), and often used together with peacekeeping (62%) and the threat or use of force (62%). They are also frequently accompanied by regional and unilateral sanctions (90%), which often precede UN action (70%). Effective sanctions episodes include the application of at least three types of targeted measures simultaneously, most commonly an arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze.

Myanmar advocates for ‘targeted sanctions’ to condemn severe human rights abuses, hold perpetrators accountable, and deter others from complicity, while reducing harm to the public. These measures include freezing assets, travel restrictions, arms embargoes and prohibitions on business dealings. For example, the United Nations Organisation (UN) has imposed measures and sanctions on Myanmar, primarily addressing human rights abuses and calling for political reform. Following the Myanmar military coup d’état in February 2021, the UN General Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution that “calls upon all member states to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar.” UNOPS manages two of the largest development funds in Myanmar, including the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) and the Access to Health Fund.  
  
To mitigate the adverse effects of sanctions on innocent civilians, Myanmar proposes a comprehensive strategy. Firstly, establish a humanitarian fund for those affected, jointly funded by sanctioning entities. Secondly, leverage innovative technologies such as blockchain-based systems and advanced surveillance tools to precisely target sanctions, minimizing unintended consequences. Thirdly, support economic expansion efforts in sanctioned countries to create alternative sources of income and promote resilience. This involves investing in new industries and promoting entrepreneurship. Additionally, consider temporarily suspending sanctions during emergencies to expedite humanitarian aid delivery. Finally, the target country should also be fully involved in the dialogue on the sanctions regime.

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