Rethinking Targeted Sanctions

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Abstract

Despite having been in the political and scientific limelight for nearly two decades, the question of the effectiveness of targeted sanctions continues to puzzle and engage practitioners and scholars. Having been previously tormented by the implementation failures and (un-)intended consequences of comprehensive sanctions practice, a scientific question is still warranted when thinking of targeted sanctions: Why is the design and evaluation of this tool in terms of impact so complex and what research approach would be most effective for gaining a better understanding of sanctions “effectiveness”? To shed light on this question, this research project examines the use of EU and UN targeted sanctions as a means of addressing crises and armed conflicts. Particular attention is paid to the role of restrictive measures imposed on individual entities by the use of travel bans and targeted assets freezes. While decision-makers in collective security bodies have been actively engaged in developing the targeted sanctions instrument, there has so far been little recognition in the academic literature of what consequences targeted sanctions have had for the general theory of sanctions. In this dissertation, I demonstrate how the move from comprehensive sanctions to targeted sanctions requires a re-thinking, in particular when it comes to understanding and evaluating sanctions’ “impact”. Starting by illustrating how the shift in thinking has come about and what it has meant theoretically and empirically, the dissertation illustrates various problems in the operation of sanctions. The main aim is to demonstrate the complexity of the sanctions process and the need to think holistically about it. Each component in the sanctions management and implementation process is likely to shape the final impact on the target in a way not always anticipated. Thus, besides the overall puzzle of how targeted sanctions can contribute to conflict resolution, this dissertation seeks to illustrate a number of problems with current practice. Areas addressed herein are: the problem of oversimplification when designing and evaluating sanctions, the problem of mixing symbolic and concrete sanctions, the problem of overlooking targeted sanctions as embedded in a larger strategic setting, the problem of defining a sanctions episode too broad, and finally, the problem of neglecting a target’s perception of the imposed sanctions policy. The research project is empirically oriented and contains references to interviews conducted with practitioners working with sanctions policies (with the EU and the UN). Contribution to the field is also made by the inclusion of unique interviews with a number of individuals, which have been included on the EU and UN sanctions lists. In all, the dissertation makes a theory-building attempt by discussing existing epistemological as well as methodological approaches.
Short Bio:
Mikael Eriksson is of Swedish citizenship. He graduated from the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (Sweden), in 2000. Prior to commencing his PhD at the EUI in 2005 he was employed as a project leader at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research where he examined Patterns of Armed Conflict (Uppsala Conflict Data Programme) as well as the role of Targeted Sanctions (Special Program on the Implementation of Targeted Sanctions). Eriksson’s research interests include Causes of War, Conflict Resolution, Security Studies and International Relations. In addition to theory related work, he has alone and in collaboration with other scholars been participating in a number of fieldtrips relating to his research. Eriksson has also been a trainee at the Swedish Embassy in Washington (US) and at the EU Commission in Brussels (Belgium).