

Question 1 example

As the debate about whether to wage war against Iraq intensifies, proponents of a military strike argue that sanctions have failed and force remains the only option to achieve the United States' primary goals in that Persian Gulf nation – overthrow Saddam Hussein's military regime and halt his weapons of mass destruction program, particularly his efforts to develop a nuclear arsenal. I do not agree that war is the *only* option; sanctions continue to be a possible policy prescription, along with other diplomatic alternatives, such as intervention by the United Nations, and simply taking no action at all. When determining the *best* option, however, war, while hardly an ideal choice, offers the best means for achieving America's desired ends, the two goals stated above. An analysis comparing the sanctions alternative with a military campaign, according to David Baldwin's logic of choice theory, illustrates why war, although it may be unpalatable from a public opinion standpoint both within America and the international community, is the means of recourse most likely to further the United States' aims.

To apply the logic of choice methodology to the policy options of sanctions and war, it is necessary to examine five areas with regards to each alternative – effectiveness, costs to the user, costs to the target, stakes for the user, and stakes for the target. (p. 90-91 Baldwin 1999) The individual analyses in each of these categories are then synthesized to weigh the overall costs versus effectiveness of each option, and, in particular, to account for the “net” costs and benefits, in order to see how the choices compare to one another. (p. 86 Baldwin 1999)

To begin, consider how these categories apply to sanctions. An evaluation of how the decade-long imposition of sanctions in the wake of Operation Desert Storm demonstrates that neither of the stated foreign policy goals – regime change and the halting of weapons proliferation – have been ascertained. Saddam Hussein remains firmly entrenched in power, and the suffering the sanctions have wrought on the Iraqi people has failed to incite an opposition movement with a serious chance of overthrowing the dictatorship. Furthermore, although sanctions may have delayed and hindered Saddam Hussein's development of weapons of mass destruction, his program has not been dismantled completely. In addition, there are indications that he continues to try to make

progress on his nascent nuclear arsenal. In short, sanctions have not halted his efforts to amass weapons with horrific capabilities.

The effectiveness of sanctions can be analyzed further by combining Baldwin's theory with that of Richard Haass, and applying some of Haass' standards to Baldwin's criteria for whether sanctions should be used. For example, Haass notes that "the limitations of sanctions are more pronounced than their accomplishments. Sanctions alone are unlikely to achieve results if the aims are large or time is short." (p. 77 Haass 1997) In the case of Iraq, the aims that America has been trying to achieve with sanctions qualify as large ones, and therefore are not appropriate for the use of sanctions. Furthermore, regarding the time element, Haass advises that "any imposition of sanctions should be swift. As with other forms of intervention, including military action, gradual escalation allows the target to adapt and adjust." (p. 82 Haass 1997) This seems to be the reason that the decade-long sanctions have failed to work. It is also the reason why additional sanctions, even if restructured, do not promise to be any more effective at this point. Iraq has had ample opportunity to adapt to the effects of sanctions, and, consequently, they have lost some of their impact as a policy tool.

When analyzing the costs of sanctions to the target, it is necessary in the case of Iraq to question whether the target under scrutiny – Saddam Hussein and his government – have really been forced to pay costs under sanctions, as Baldwin stipulates a target should in order for this option to be effective. (p. 90 Baldwin 1999). The structure of the sanctions, it can be argued, have brought much higher costs to Iraqi civilians than Saddam Hussein himself. Therefore, Hussein has faced little incentive to capitulate to the United States' policy aims in Iraq, and sanctions have failed Baldwin's test regarding cost to the target. When considering costs to the user, however, the price tag gets much steeper. Although sanctions may seem a cheaper option than military force for the United States, the costs of economic punishment, when compared to its effectiveness, may be higher than it is worth. Sanctions force America to pay a high price in terms of criticism from the international community and in credibility. Many countries have openly disagreed with the U.S about using them, and, in some cases, have even flouted them, illicitly trading with Iraq.

As far as the “stakes for the user and target” that sanctions present, there are also undesirable results on both sides. (p. 91 Baldwin 1999) From the Iraqi standpoint, sanctions present low stakes for Saddam Hussein, because he has remained in power despite them, and, due to certain countries violating the prohibition on economic activity with Iraq, can often continue doing business. At the same time, the stakes for the United States are quite high in comparison with the effectiveness; Iraq continues to pose a threat to stability in the Middle East and its weapons of mass destruction program poses a threat to security in the United States.

Baldwin does not provide exact formulas or means for assigning specific values in these cost-benefit analyses, inviting a certain amount of subjectivity in evaluating them (perhaps a flaw in his theory); however, his criteria offer enough guidelines to make a general judgment about whether or not the costs of sanctions are commensurate with their effectiveness. In the case of Iraq, the costs and stakes far outweigh the benefits, and sanctions are no longer worth using to address Saddam Hussein’s regime. Even when one separates the question of whether sanctions are effective with the question of whether they should be used, as Baldwin advises, (p. 81 Baldwin 1999) the argument can be made that the answer to both questions is “no.”

The debate about sanctions does not end there, however. According to his logic of choice theory, Baldwin advises that “it is not enough to describe the disadvantages of sanctions; one must show that some other policy alternative is better” by analyzing the costs of each policy option. (p. 84 Baldwin 1999) Indeed, those same cost-analysis criteria can be used to demonstrate that another policy option is more promising – war.

War, a somber option not without its detractions, at least offers the promise of a higher level of effectiveness given the costs involved. Since America has not initiated war, it is impossible at this point to evaluate for certain just how effective a military strike would be. Given the United States’ overwhelming military advantage against Iraq, it is quite likely, though, that a war, if sustained long enough, could achieve the two policy objectives of regime change and a halt to the weapons of mass destruction program.

War also offers a greater possibility of truly imposing costs on the intended target. A military strike offers a chance to have a direct impact on Saddam Hussein and the

various military and governmental structures that prop up his dictatorship, rather than civilians, since a military campaign could more carefully target installations where these agents are centered. Most likely, civilians would suffer at least somewhat, as well, but not exclusively, as was the case with sanctions. Certainly, the use of force poses significant costs to the user, the United States, also. High defense spending bills, the loss of American lives, and criticism in the international community are all potential liabilities. Baldwin stresses, though, that it is necessary to weigh the costs in terms of a policy's effectiveness, and, given the likelihood of America achieving its goals, it is arguable that these costs are worth bearing.

Concerning stakes for the target versus stakes for the user, war presents a reversal of the situation under sanctions. Stakes for Iraq in terms of the war option escalate significantly; Saddam Hussein stands to lose control of his country, see his weapons program dismantled and his nation and government decimated. Stakes for America are still high, but not as high as in the sanctions situation because now the likelihood of toppling Hussein's regime increases American security. Indeed, Baldwin states, "Ceteris paribus, the bigger the stakes, the more valuable is the contribution." (p. 91 Baldwin 1999)

Iraq's burgeoning nuclear weapons program, and the potential risks it poses to American and international safety, merits special attention regarding the stakes for the United States. Scott Sagan's arguments about the risks of nuclear proliferation offer insight as to why the stakes for America are so high. Iraq and its weapons program, so far, fail to meet many of the criteria Sagan outlines to ensure that the program will not result in some sort of nuclear explosion, intended or not. For example, Iraq's military is not subject to strong civilian control, it has not outlined plans to ensure that its nuclear arsenal would have sufficient safety stop-gaps and a strong chain of command behind it to prevent accidents or unauthorized use. (p. 47 Sagan and Waltz 2003) Furthermore, Iraq hardly exhibits a level of openness that allows for scrutiny to determine if, in fact, it has bolstered its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction with any safety measures. (p. 75 Sagan and Waltz 2003) (Indeed, it has not allowed United Nations weapons inspectors to review its arsenal for several years.) Finally, Iraq, given its political sympathies, anti-American stance, and location in the Middle East, could be a prime candidate to become

a new proliferant that passes weapons technology to a terrorist group which might not be restrained by the notion of deterrence. (p. 163 Sagan and Waltz 2003) All of these considerations raise the stakes for the United States significantly, indicating that sanctions would be a poor choice of policy, given the urgency of dealing with this situation. Furthermore, the costs that the United States and other nations would incur if any of these potential risks become a reality in the future far outweigh the costs of a military strike now, further strengthening the case for war.

The drumbeat for war, certainly, is likely to be matched by a cadence of counterarguments criticizing the military option. Opponents of force would argue, for example, that a military strike would unleash violence against Iraqi civilians. The years of economic sanctions, however, have wrought their share of civilian deaths, perhaps more than a war would cause. Indeed, "... various agencies of the United Nations... have estimated that they have contributed to hundreds of thousands of deaths." (p. 5 Mueller and Mueller 1999) Furthermore, sanctions have caused suffering and poverty, due to the fact that medical supplies and food have had a hard time entering the country. This might continue temporarily during a war, but afterward, it could pave the way for these things to enter the country freely again.

Others might posit that a better alternative is "smart sanctions" targeted at specific aspects of Iraqi military development. These could alleviate civilian suffering and offer another option in place of war. Haass, however, notes that smart sanctions are only a "partial solution." (p. 79 Haass 1997) Furthermore, even smart sanctions, although they may garner more international support than broader economic punishment measures, can be difficult to monitor, creating obstacles to ensuring that all other nations comply with the sanctions' stipulations.

War opponents also might caution that a military strike will meet with criticism in the international community, and America's diplomatic credibility will be weakened. That is certainly a possibility, but the continued use of sanctions does not offer more promise for international support. Indeed, the prolonged use of sanctions has already met with considerable international outcry and disdain. The international community has often vouched for a third policy option entirely, which is simply to leave Iraq alone, but this option is antithesis to America's goals regarding that country.

When considering Baldwin's claim that "the wisdom of a decision to use sanctions is determined not by whether their expected utility is high or low, but by whether it is higher or lower than that of alternative courses of action," (p. 106 Baldwin 1999), it becomes apparent that although economic sanctions may offer some utility in achieving the United States' goals regarding Iraq, the option of war offers more. While not the only option available, a military strike, given its costs versus the probability of having a significant effect, is the best alternative under the circumstances. Baldwin's logic of choice theory does not promise to unveil an ideal option without detractors, but rather, it is designed to weed out emotional and political considerations and focus policy analysis on the cost and effectiveness of various proposals. Even Baldwin himself acknowledges that these options may be nothing more than "dismal alternatives." (p. 92 Baldwin 1999) In this case, the most compelling of the dismal alternatives is war.