



Article

# Economic Sanctions and the Dynamism of International Politics: Assessing Iran's Adaptive Strategies to Sanctions, 2017–2024

Anyalebechi, Shammah Mahakwe\*<sup>1</sup>, Dumle Callistus Nekabari<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
  2. Department of History and International Diplomacy, Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
- \* Correspondence: [Shammah.anyalebechi@ust.edu.ng](mailto:Shammah.anyalebechi@ust.edu.ng)

**Abstract:** Economic sanctions are essential instruments in international relations, often used to ensure compliance, prevent hostility, and uphold global security. Nonetheless, its implementation in Iran from 2017 to 2023 exposed considerable difficulties. The issue is in the twin effects of the sanctions: while they sought to mitigate nuclear proliferation, regional aggressiveness, and non-compliance with international standards, their unexpected repercussions significantly harmed Iran's economy, political stability, and civilian populations. The humanitarian problems, economic reliance, and ethical issues associated with sanctions necessitated a thorough evaluation of their efficacy and wider ramifications in international relations. The research sought to examine the influence of sanctions on Iran's conduct and their effectiveness in alleviating global security threats throughout this timeframe. Grounded in constructivist theory, the research used a qualitative approach, utilising content analysis to evaluate secondary data from policy papers, academic publications, and reports. The results underscored the limited efficacy of sanctions in securing compliance, while exposing significant economic disruptions, humanitarian catastrophes, and ethical quandaries. Strategic relationships with non-Western states alleviated some effects but highlighted the need for sanctions reform. It determined that sanctions are inadequate without supplementary diplomatic initiatives. The research concluded that future sanctions systems should include humanitarian protections and international cooperation to improve efficacy and reduce damage to civilian populations.

**Citation:** Anyalebechi, S. M., Nekabari, D. C. Economic Sanctions and the Dynamism of International Politics: Assessing Iran's Adaptive Strategies to Sanctions, 2017–2024. *Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History* 2025, 6(3), 178-190.

Received: 19<sup>th</sup> Mar 2025  
Revised: 25<sup>th</sup> Mar 2025  
Accepted: 30<sup>th</sup> Mar 2025  
Published: 6<sup>th</sup> Apr 2025



**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

**Keywords:** Economic Sanctions, International Politics, Adaptive Strategies, International Relations

## 1. Introduction

International sanctions are essential tools in global politics, used to alter the conduct of governments or groups that violate international standards or threaten global stability. These measures, including economic, political, and diplomatic constraints, have undergone substantial evolution in recent years. Sanctions imposed on Russia after 2022 have transformed global commerce and geopolitics, particularly altering energy trade dynamics between Russia and China due to Western constraints [1]. Simultaneously, targeted penalties, including money freezes and travel restrictions, have been implemented against people and entities to mitigate unlawful acts and human rights abuses. Although effective, sanctions often elicit worldwide dissent and unforeseen economic repercussions for both the targeted nations and the imposing states. Recent studies highlight the need of reconciling the efficacy of sanctions with their ethical ramifications while investigating alternate diplomatic strategies for durable results [2].

These complications underscore the need for strategic frameworks that include sanctions within wider international legal and diplomatic settings.

Contemporary international politics traverses a terrain of fluctuating power dynamics, cultural conflicts, and changing alliances. The 2023 geopolitical tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan underscore the convergence of armed confrontations and diplomatic efforts, necessitating a reassessment of established policies and regional dynamics [3]. The interaction between cultural heritage and international law has become more significant as countries strive to safeguard their identity in the context of economic globalisation [4]. These innovations highlight a paradigm in which political discourse surpasses conventional limits, using technology, environmental regulations, and socioeconomic frameworks to tackle global concerns. Recent studies indicate that the interconnectedness of countries, while promoting collaboration, concurrently exacerbates problems such as economic dependency and political polarization [5]. Thus, contemporary international politics need a comprehensive strategy that integrates historical perspectives with novel governing mechanisms to maintain peace and prosperity.

Sanctions have served as a significant instrument in international relations, used to impose political and economic pressure on countries such as Iran. From 2017 until 2024, the United States, the European Union, and other international entities put sanctions on Iran to mitigate apprehensions over its nuclear aspirations, regional dominance, and alleged human rights abuses. The sanctions focused on essential industries like energy, finance, and technology, resulting in considerable socio-economic upheaval in Iran [6]. The extensive restrictions impaired Iran's access to global financial systems, resulting in inflation and a significant depreciation of its currency. Iran exhibited resilience via domestic manufacturing efforts and enhanced relationships with other commercial partners, including China and Russia, illustrating the limitations of sanctions in fulfilling political aims [7].

Sanctions imposed on Iran in the international political sphere have sparked discussions over their efficacy and moral ramifications. Advocates contend that penalties function as non-violent instruments to compel behavioural modification and prevent nuclear proliferation. Critics, however, emphasise the humanitarian repercussions, since sanctions often intensify difficulties for the civilian populace rather than only targeting the government. During this era, shortages of medical supplies resulting from budgetary constraints raised worldwide worries on the humanitarian consequences of sanctions [8]. These discussions highlight the intricacies of using sanctions as a policy tool in international relations.

Additionally, the interval from 2017 to 2023 signified a transformation in Iran's external relations, as it endeavoured to mitigate the economic repercussions of sanctions. Tehran established strategic alliances inside the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and strengthened its economic and military collaboration with non-Western countries [9]. This shift illustrated Iran's capacity to manoeuvre within the geopolitical limitations imposed by sanctions. The continuation of sanctions has also impacted worldwide discussions on multilateralism, prompting demands for a more coordinated and equitable strategy to resolve international conflicts. Iran's situation illustrates the complex interaction of sanctions, internal fortitude, and shifting global alliances.

Sanctions have had a crucial impact in influencing the geopolitical dynamics of Iran from 2017 until 2023. Economic sanctions, especially those enacted by the United States and its allies, aimed at Iran's nuclear program, regional dominance, and alleged human rights abuses. The sanctions impacted essential industries, such as energy and banking, resulting in inflation and economic instability. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) restricted Iran's access to international financial systems, intensifying internal economic challenges [6]. The sanctions exacerbated widespread unrest in Iran, generating repercussions that influenced political stability.

What is the efficacy of these approaches in attaining political goals without exacerbating humanitarian conditions?

The humanitarian consequences of these restrictions have been a disputed matter. Critics contend that sanctions disproportionately affect civilians, restricting access to vital products like medication and food [7]. The pressure on the healthcare industry, resulting from limited access to overseas markets, intensified public discontent. This scenario elicited ethical apprehensions over the effectiveness of penalties as a policy instrument. Advocates assert that penalties are essential to dissuade activities that jeopardise global security. Nevertheless, the enduring nature of Iran's nuclear aspirations and regional dominance indicates the inadequate efficacy of these tactics in attaining full compliance.

The adaptation tactics of Iran have garnered attention throughout this era. The nation sought economic resilience by enhancing local output and reinforcing relationships with non-Western allies like China and Russia [10]. These initiatives allowed Iran to somewhat mitigate the economic repercussions of sanctions. This move, however, produced fresh geopolitical difficulties as Iran's relationships with alternative countries challenged the prevailing international order. Can sanctions fulfil their intended goals when the targeted country identifies feasible alternatives for economic and political sustenance?

The extensive worldwide ramifications of sanctions on Iran illustrate a complicated interaction of power relations. The sanctions have strained U.S.-Iran ties and impacted global energy markets and trade lines. The European Union had difficulties in reconciling its diplomatic objectives with its reliance on U.S. financial systems [11]. The sanctions evaluated the effectiveness of multilateral institutions, as nations inside the United Nations deliberated their legality and humanitarian consequences. What implications does this have for the future of international standards regulating economic coercion?

The ethical and legal quandaries about penalties still unanswered. Proponents of international sanctions contend that collaborative measures augment credibility and adherence [12], [11]. The Iranian instance highlights the difficulties in achieving equal enforcement and reducing collateral harm. Sanctions' role in sustaining economic inequalities in Iran has faced criticism, prompting demands for more focused measures targeting the leadership instead of the general population [12]. These considerations underscore the need for a reevaluation of sanctions as an instrument in international affairs. This research aims to investigate the roles economic sanctions on international politics: *Assessing Iran's adaptive strategies to sanctions, 2017–2024*. Based on the forgoing, the following research questions were stated to guide the study:

- a. What have been the primary objectives of sanctions imposed on Iran?
- b. How have the economic and humanitarian impacts of sanctions influenced Iran's domestic stability and its citizens' quality of life during this period?
- c. How does Iran's strategic alliances with non-Western countries mitigated the effects of sanctions?
- d. What are the ethical and legal implications of using sanctions as a tool of international politics, particularly in the case of Iran?

## **Literature Review**

### **International Sanctions**

International sanctions are fundamental to global diplomacy and international relations, functioning as instruments to confront state and non-state actions that jeopardise peace, breach international law, or undermine human rights. These actions are implemented to prevent, force, or penalise businesses that diverge from internationally recognised standards, using economic, political, or social limitations to ensure conformity or express displeasure. Sanctions are often discussed about their effectiveness, legality, and ethical considerations. The variety of their application—from trade embargoes to asset

freezes—demonstrates their intricacy as tools of global governance. Academics from several fields have provided intricate interpretations of punishments; yet, deficiencies in these definitions have necessitated ongoing scholarly inquiry and revision.

Hufbauer et al. defined sanctions as “intentional governmental measures to impose economic hardship on a designated country or group to attain policy goals” [13]. This concept emphasises economic suffering as fundamental to sanctions, although it mostly concentrates on state acts and neglects the role of multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, hence requiring an expanded perspective. Elliott further on the notion, defining sanctions as “coercive measures imposed multilaterally or unilaterally to influence political or economic behaviour” [14]. This perspective includes international methods but inadequately addresses non-economic penalties, such as diplomatic or cultural limitations, resulting in a deficiency in comprehensively addressing their breadth.

Galtung posited that penalties are “non-military instruments of intervention designed to induce compliance through deprivation and coercion” [15]. Galtung’s focus on non-military instruments is perceptive but neglects the humanitarian repercussions often associated with sanctions, necessitating the incorporation of ethical concerns in the definition. Kaempfer and Lowenberg posited that sanctions are “strategic measures designed to modify the cost-benefit analysis of targeted entities in engaging in undesirable actions” [16]. This concept is grounded in economic theory however fails to recognise the symbolic and psychological effects sanctions have on international relations, necessitating a comprehensive understanding. Drezner defined sanctions as “policy instruments that fulfil both punitive and signalling functions to affect international conduct” [17]. Drezner’s perspective incorporates the signalling function of sanctions but insufficiently considers their systemic effects on global economic networks and third-party nations, necessitating more clarification.

International sanctions are multifaceted instruments used by nations or multilateral organisations to influence, discourage, or penalise non-compliant entities via a blend of economic, political, and symbolic actions. These instruments seek to rectify breaches of international standards while simultaneously conveying displeasure, fostering responsibility, and averting escalatory conduct. This perspective, in contrast to previous definitions, integrates the complex effects of sanctions, highlighting their structural, humanitarian, and psychological repercussions on both the targeted and the international community. This concept underscores the need of reconciling strategic aims with ethical and legal issues, bridging gaps in current literature by including a comprehensive view on their application and ramifications.

### **International Politics**

International politics provides the foundation for comprehending the interactions, disputes, and cooperation among states in an increasingly linked globe. It emphasises the allocation of power, decision-making procedures, and the strategies used by states to accomplish their objectives within a global framework. The domain includes several phenomena like as diplomacy, warfare, commerce, and alliances, all shaped by historical, cultural, and economic settings. Globalisation is redefining conventional borders, leading to the evolution of international politics and stimulating discussions on sovereignty, global governance, and the ethics of involvement. Academics have provided many definitions of the idea, illustrating differing theoretical viewpoints. Morgenthau characterised international politics as “a struggle for power among nations in an anarchic international system” [18]. This realist view emphasises power relations however neglects the increasing impact of non-state players, including multinational businesses and international organisations, hence requiring a more expansive conceptual framework.

Waltz defined international politics as “a system driven by the distribution of power among states, determining their behaviour and relationships” [19]. Although Waltz emphasises structural realism, his definition neglects the influence of ideologies, identities,

and transnational movements on state behaviour, necessitating the integration of constructivist perspectives. Keohane and Nye characterised international politics as “a complex web of interdependence where states and non-state actors engage through multiple channels” [20]. This liberal viewpoint emphasises interconnectedness while minimising the enduring significance of power politics and conflicts, which continue to be fundamental in international relations.

Bull posited that international politics is “the study of order in world affairs, maintained through rules, institutions, and diplomacy” [21]. Bull's concept prioritises order but fails to account for the disruptive influences of technology and globalisation, which often contest existing norms and institutions. Rosenau defined international politics as “the interplay of global, regional, and local forces influencing decisions in a decentralised world” [22]. This concept encompasses complexity but fails to highlight the ethical aspects of international decision-making, allowing for further examination of normative issues.

International politics is described as the complex interaction of states, non-state actors, and institutions within a global system marked by power dynamics, interdependence, and normative structures. This concept recognises the persistent significance of state-centric theories while including the impact of globalisation, technology, and transnational movements. It highlights the interaction between material and conceptual factors, rectifying deficiencies in prior definitions by integrating ethical issues, including justice and equality, into decision-making processes. This concept emphasises the significance of international politics as a dynamic and changing field, essential for analysing current global concerns and informing the development of more inclusive and sustainable policies.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This research is based on the idea of Constructivism. The theory, established by Alexander Wendt in the early 1990s, signifies a substantial transformation in international relations theory by highlighting the influence of ideas, identities, and social norms on state action. In contrast to Realism and Liberalism, which emphasise material power and institutional frameworks, constructivism posits that international politics is socially built via the interactions and shared perceptions of participants [23]. The idea posits that the identities and interests of states are not static but are influenced by norms, culture, and language. This theory is especially pertinent to comprehending the functions of sanctions in international politics, since it elucidates how norms of compliance and defiance affect a state's reaction to these measures.

The sanctions levied on Iran from 2017 to 2023 illustrate the constructivist viewpoint, emphasising the influence of global norms and identities on international reactions. Constructivism posits that penalties function not just as coercive instruments but also as means to influence global expectations and convey disapproval of non-compliant actions. Sanctions imposed on Iran were often characterised as a unified effort to maintain international standards against nuclear proliferation [24]. This perspective corresponds with constructivist theories, whereby the validity and efficacy of penalties rely on collective global perceptions. Iran's disobedience might be seen as a declaration of its identity and sovereignty in opposition to perceived Western hegemony.

The idea elucidates the influence of speech on the execution and interpretation of penalties. Constructivism asserts that the significance and efficacy of penalties stem from the narratives that surround them. The United States often justified sanctions on Iran by referencing the principle of global security, depicting Iran as a menace to world stability [25]. In a similar vein, Iran responded to these narratives by characterising sanctions as unfair and imperialistic, appealing to anti-Western feeling and cultivating unity among non-aligned nations. This dynamic highlights how ideas, rather than just tangible consequences, shape the results of punishments.

Constructivism elucidates the developing norms that influence international responses to sanctions. Over time, Iran used its connections with non-Western nations to contest the legality of unilateral sanctions, advocating for a reinterpretation of international standards regarding economic coercion [26]. This illustrates a constructivist perspective that global standards are dynamic, subject to contestation and reinterpretation via interactions among various players. The examination of Iran's resilience and adaptation methods underscores how regimes deliberately construct alternative standards to manage international isolation.

A fundamental advantage of constructivism is its capacity to include ethical considerations into the examination of penalties. The theory advocates for an examination of the ethical frameworks that support sanctions, interrogating their humanitarian consequences and conformity with global justice ideals [27]. The constructivist perspective in Iran highlights the conflict between ensuring adherence to international rules and mitigating the unforeseen socio-economic impacts on the general populace. The ethical aspect is essential for comprehending the wider ramifications of punishments.

In sum, constructivism provides a thorough framework for understanding the functions of sanctions in international politics. By concentrating on norms, identities, and language, it elucidates the intricate dynamics of power, legitimacy, and resistance that define the Iran instance. This paper investigates the functions and effects of sanctions on Iran from 2017 to 2023 within this theoretical framework.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research used a qualitative methodology. This methodology was used to provide a comprehensive analysis of the function of sanctions in international relations, specifically regarding Iran from 2017 to 2023. This method facilitates the examination of intricate social, political, and economic events via detailed narratives and contextual analysis. By concentrating on speech, norms, and identities, it adheres to the Constructivist paradigm, highlighting the subjective interpretations and interactions that influence state conduct and reactions to punishments. Qualitative approaches facilitate the examination of diverse views, ethical issues, and geopolitical dynamics, essential for a thorough investigation of this complex subject.

The research included secondary data sources, including textbooks, government papers, United Nations Security Council Resolutions, and significant international agreements, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and JCPOA+5. Furthermore, media coverage from reputable sources such as CNN and Al Jazeera films offered significant insights into the geopolitical background. Relevant academic papers enhanced the analysis by providing varied scholarly viewpoints. Diverse sources facilitated a thorough comprehension of the roles and effects of sanctions on Iran from 2017 to 2023, reinforcing the study's qualitative methodology.

The gathered secondary data will be subjected to content and theme analysis to derive significant patterns and insights. Content analysis facilitates a methodical evaluation of textual material, including governmental papers and media stories, to discern prevalent themes and storylines. Thematic analysis enhances this by categorising data into cohesive groups that align with the study's aims. This dual approach is warranted as it corresponds with the qualitative technique, enabling a comprehensive examination of the social, political, and normative aspects behind sanctions on Iran from 2017 to 2023.

### Data Presentation

**Research Question One:** Sanctions are potent instruments in international relations, often used to modify state conduct, ensure adherence to international standards, and uphold global security. Since 2018, sanctions on Iran have escalated, focussing on its nuclear program, regional operations, and economic networks. These steps signify the international community's attempts to mitigate Iran's alleged destabilising activities and

assure compliance with global standards, especially concerning nuclear proliferation. The efficacy of these sanctions is extensively contested, with their repercussions affecting not just state actors but also civilians. This paper analyses the main aims of sanctions imposed on Iran, emphasising their justification, results, and wider ramifications.

**Curbing Nuclear Proliferation:** The primary aim of sanctions levied on Iran, particularly after the United States' exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, is to inhibit its nuclear aspirations. The sanctions sought to compel Iran to adhere to international standards by restricting its capacity to enrich uranium and advance nuclear weaponry [28]. Economic restrictions focused on critical industries, like oil and banking, to diminish Iran's ability to finance its nuclear program. Although sanctions elicited temporary cooperation, Iran's incremental reestablishment of uranium enrichment highlights their limitations. The international community has deliberated whether sanctions alone can impede proliferation or whether more extensive diplomatic initiatives are necessary.

**Regional Stability and Security:** Sanctions imposed on Iran aim to diminish its influence in the Middle East, especially in the wars concerning Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The sanctions sought to undermine Iran's backing of militias and destabilising operations by targeting companies associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its regional affiliates [29]. Nonetheless, these steps further heightened tensions, prompting Iran to amplify its backing for these organisations in retaliation. This highlights the twin difficulty of curbing regional hostility while preventing inadvertent conflict escalation.

**Economic Coercion for Policy Change:** Economic sanctions have functioned as a mechanism to compel Iran to modify its policies, especially on its missile development and human rights practices. Sanctions targeted essential income sources, including oil exports, to generate internal economic pressure that would urge Iran's government to negotiate or implement reforms [30]. Although these sanctions significantly affected Iran's economy, their efficacy in inducing policy change has been disputed. Critics contend that sanctions often inflict more damage on civilians than on officials, hence creating ethical questions about their implementation.

**Signalling Normative Compliance:** Sanctions further provide a symbolic function, strengthening international norms and indicating disapproval of actions that violate global standards. In the instance of Iran, sanctions served as a cautionary measure to other nations on the repercussions of breaching nuclear accords and participating in regional destabilisation [31]. This purpose embodies a Constructivist perspective on sanctions as instruments for influencing global norms. Their efficacy is contingent upon the cohesion and legitimacy of the multinational coalition implementing them.

**Encouraging Diplomatic Engagement:** Another aim of sanctions has been to compel Iran to engage in negotiations. Sanctions were intended to both penalise and encourage diplomatic efforts by generating economic and political pressure. The JCPOA discussions illustrated this dual-purpose method, as sanctions were somewhat alleviated as an incentive for adherence [32]. The reimposition of sanctions after the United States' withdrawal diminished their legitimacy, hindering subsequent diplomatic endeavours.

**Countering Terrorism Financing:** Ultimately, sanctions aimed targeting Iran's financial networks to obstruct support for terrorist outfits. Asset freezes and banking restrictions were enacted to impede monetary transfers to organisations like Hezbollah and Hamas [33]. Although these restrictions curtailed some financial avenues, Iran's ingenuity in establishing alternate networks illustrates the difficulties in attaining complete efficacy.

**Research Question Two: How have the economic and humanitarian impacts of sanctions influenced Iran's domestic stability and its citizens' quality of life during this period?**

Sanctions have significantly impacted Iran's economy and humanitarian conditions, especially after the escalation of measures in 2018 when the United States exited the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The sanctions, aimed at critical industries such as oil, money, and technology, were intended to restrain Iran's nuclear aspirations and diminish its regional might. Nonetheless, their repercussions have gone beyond economic boundaries, impacting the quotidian existence of individuals and undermining domestic governing frameworks.

**Economic Contraction and Inflation:** The sanctions imposed on Iran have resulted in a catastrophic economic effect, leading to substantial GDP contractions and rampant inflation. Sanctions diminished the Iranian government's capacity to finance public services and sustain economic stability by limiting oil exports, its primary source of income [28]. The World Bank indicated that Iran's economy shrank by 7.6% in 2019, illustrating the detrimental impact of restricted access to international markets. Inflation rates, propelled by currency depreciation, surpassed 40%, diminishing individuals' buying power and exacerbating poverty levels [34]. Although sanctions intended to exert pressure on the government, their economic repercussions have disproportionately impacted disadvantaged groups, exacerbating inequality and inciting public discontent.

**Unemployment and Labour Market Strain:** Sanctions also damaged Iran's labour market, resulting in substantial job losses in sectors dependent on exports and foreign investments. The energy industry, a vital employer, has diminished output and sales, worsening unemployment rates [35]. Youth unemployment, always a pressing issue, deteriorated when enterprises encountered closures or reductions in size. Furthermore, sanctions restricted prospects for international commerce and technical cooperation, hindering employment growth and innovation in nascent sectors. The issues in the employment market have exacerbated Iran's internal stability, leading to heightened social discontent and rallies.

**Healthcare and Humanitarian Consequences:** The sanctions have significantly affected access to healthcare, representing a crucial humanitarian consequence. Financial constraints have impeded Iran's capacity to import vital pharmaceuticals and medical apparatus, resulting in shortages of life-saving medications and adversely impacting the management of chronic diseases [30]. The situation deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic, since sanctions hindered access to vaccinations and protective equipment, hence exposing the people to increased health risks. Humanitarian exclusions in sanctions regimes often neglect practical and financial obstacles, resulting in regular persons suffering the consequences of these limitations.

**Social Resilience and Adaptation:** Notwithstanding these hurdles, Iranian society has shown exceptional resilience in response to sanctions. Local industries have adjusted to supply constraints by increasing local output, especially in agriculture and medicines [36]. Informal networks and alternative trading agreements with nations like China and Russia have offered no economic respite. Nevertheless, these adaptive procedures are unable to completely mitigate the wider effects, since they often entail inefficiencies and elevated expenses. Furthermore, extended sanctions have cultivated a feeling of solidarity and resistance among certain elements of the populace, enhancing patriotic sentiments. Sanctions have profoundly impacted Iran's economy and society, resulting in a multifaceted array of repercussions that go beyond its original goals. Although they have effectively pressured the government, the resultant harm to people and internal stability presents ethical and practical dilemmas.

**Research Question Four: How does Iran's strategic alliances with non-Western countries mitigated the effects of sanctions?**

Iran's strategic partnerships with non-Western nations have been essential in mitigating the profound economic and political repercussions of sanctions imposed by the West. In the wake of the United States' reimposition of sanctions in 2018, Iran endeavoured



to fortify its alliances with significant non-Western partners, including China, Russia, and neighbouring countries. These partnerships offered alternate trade channels, investment prospects, and geopolitical support, which mitigated the impact of sanctions and allowed Iran to maintain a measure of economic and political stability [37].

**Economic Diversification through Trade with China:** China, as Iran's foremost trade partner, significantly contributed to alleviating the economic repercussions of sanctions. Iran evaded oil export limits and acquired needed items via bilateral agreements. The 25-year strategic partnership agreement established in 2021 comprised stipulations for energy commerce, infrastructural advancement, and military collaboration [38]. By persistently acquiring Iranian oil, often at reduced prices, China supplied Iran with essential cash sources that mitigated the financial detriments imposed by sanctions. Moreover, Chinese investments in Iran's transport and technology sectors have generated chances for economic expansion and reduced Iran's dependence on Western markets.

**Military and Security Cooperation with Russia:** Iran's partnership with Russia provided substantial assistance in military and security sectors. This alliance, solidified by collaborative military drills and armament pacts, strengthened Iran's regional clout and deterrent capabilities [39]. Russia's support in international venues, especially in the United Nations Security Council, afforded Iran diplomatic power against Western narratives. Moreover, economic collaboration with Russia included cooperative ventures in energy and agriculture, which assisted Iran in stabilising its domestic economy. This partnership underscored the greater geopolitical convergence of the two states in opposing Western hegemony.

**Regional Alliances and Economic Integration:** Iran used its geographic position to enhance relations with regional neighbours and assimilate into non-Western economic structures. Collaborations with India, Turkey, and Central Asian nations enabled the establishment of alternative trade routes, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), therefore diminishing reliance on Western-dominated pathways [40]. These regional partnerships allowed Iran to maintain its commerce and circumvent sanctions-related limitations. Moreover, Iran's membership in entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has enhanced economic and security collaboration with non-Western nations.

**Challenges and Limitations of Alliances:** Although these partnerships offered significant assistance, they were not without difficulties. Iran's reliance on cheap oil deliveries to China and its constrained negotiating leverage underscored the uneven dynamics of these agreements [41]. Moreover, the absence of thorough integration into global financial institutions persisted in limiting Iran's economic potential. These relationships faced criticism for facilitating the consolidation of power by authoritarian governments, hence generating ethical questions about their long-term consequences. Iran's strategic ties with non-Western nations have alleviated several detrimental impacts of sanctions, underscoring the need for varied partnerships in addressing geopolitical issues. Through the cultivation of economic, military, and regional alliances, Iran has effectively thwarted isolation. The longevity and equilibrium of these coalitions are essential factors for the future.

**Research Question Four: What are the ethical and legal implications of using sanctions as a tool of international politics, particularly in the case of Iran?**

Sanctions serve as an instrument of international relations, designed to ensure adherence to global standards, discourage hostility, and foster peace. Nonetheless, they often provide substantial ethical and legal dilemmas. Sanctions placed on Iran from 2018 to 2023, subsequent to the U.S. exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), had extensive ramifications. Although they aimed to restrict Iran's nuclear aspirations and regional dominance, their humanitarian effects, legal concerns, and unforeseen socio-economic repercussions have ignited international discourse [28].

**Ethical Implications; Humanitarian Impact:** Sanctions imposed on Iran have often resulted in significant humanitarian disasters, disproportionately impacting disadvantaged communities. Critical commodities, including pharmaceuticals and medical apparatus, were limited owing to budgetary constraints and logistical obstacles, intensifying public health issues [30]. Critics contend that such effects violate fundamental ethical standards, since penalties punish citizens instead of focussing on state perpetrators. The COVID-19 outbreak underscored this ethical problem as sanctions obstructed Iran's access to vaccinations and protective gear. This prompts an inquiry of the justification of penalties as a policy instrument when their effects compromise essential human rights.

**Ethical Implications; Collective Punishment:** The extensive imposition of sanctions on industries including energy and finance has been condemned as collective punishment, violating international ethical norms. Sanctions have debilitated the Iranian economy, resulting in extensive unemployment, poverty, and societal turmoil [29]. These measures do not differentiate between the government and its population, raising ethical questions of justice and proportionality. Constructivist thinkers argue that penalties need to seek to modify governmental conduct while minimising adverse effects on civilian populations [32]. This requires a reassessment of penalty mechanisms to guarantee adherence to international ethical standards.

**Legal Implications; Sovereignty and International Law:** Unilateral sanctions imposed by countries, especially the United States, have prompted enquiries on their legitimacy under international law. Critics contend that these actions compromise the sovereignty of targeted states, contravening principles established in the United States Charter [39]. Moreover, the unilateral imposition of these penalties often bypasses global agreement, diminishing their credibility and efficacy. Iran has consistently contested the constitutionality of sanctions in international forums, asserting that they violate its rights to economic progress and self-determination.

**Legal Implications: Compliance and Enforcement:** Sanctions provide difficulties in terms of enforcement and adherence. Intricate legislative frameworks regulating punishments often result in discrepancies in their implementation, generating loopholes that diminish their efficacy [40]. For instance, several Iranian firms evaded sanctions by using alternate trade networks and forming agreements with non-Western nations. This underscores the need for more explicit legislative criteria and global enforcement mechanisms to guarantee accountability and transparency in the execution of sanctions. The ethical and legal ramifications of sanctions on Iran highlight the intricacies of using this instrument in global politics. Although penalties seek to enforce adherence to international standards, their humanitarian consequences and legal implications need more examination.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the analysed data, the followings findings were identified:

The results indicated that the main aims of the sanctions placed on Iran from 2018 to 2023 were diverse, focussing on discouraging nuclear proliferation, restraining regional aggressiveness, and ensuring international compliance. The sanctions aimed to diminish Iran's capacity to enrich uranium and produce nuclear weapons by focussing on essential sectors such as oil, gas, and finance [28]. Sanctions were implemented to curtail Iran's financial and logistical assistance to regional militias and terrorist organisations, with the objective of stabilising the Middle East [29]. Although these goals emphasised strategic priorities, they often failed to attain full compliance. Iran's ongoing progress in its nuclear program and its resistance to international pressure showed that sanctions alone were unable to induce behavioural change. This highlighted the inadequacies of sanctions as an isolated mechanism for resolving complex geopolitical challenges, requiring the integration of diplomatic approaches.

Sanctions severely impaired Iran's economy and intensified humanitarian issues, compromising internal stability and the quality of life for its population. The economic consequences included significant inflation, currency depreciation, and extensive unemployment resulting from diminished export earnings and foreign investments [30]. The economic shocks disproportionately impacted vulnerable communities, resulting in heightened poverty and social instability. The humanitarian consequences were as grave, since sanctions hindered Iran's access to vital medications, medical apparatus, and food resources. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, since sanctions hindered vaccine acquisition and healthcare infrastructure [39]. Although intended to target state offenders, the results revealed that sanctions inflicted collective punishment on civilians, prompting ethical questions about their proportionality and humanitarian consequences. This signified the need for reassessing penalty mechanisms to alleviate unintended repercussions.

Iran successfully alleviated the effects of sanctions by cementing its connections with non-Western nations, notably China, Russia, and neighbouring countries. These alliances offered alternate commerce lines, financial prospects, and geopolitical backing, allowing Iran to circumvent Western-imposed sanctions [32]. China's ongoing acquisition of Iranian oil via long-term contracts has bolstered Iran's economy despite considerable declines in Western markets. Russia's military and diplomatic involvement enhanced Iran's regional clout, while partnerships with regional allies enabled the establishment of economic routes such as the International North-South Transport Corridor [29]. The data indicated that Iran's adaptive techniques and geopolitical alliances substantially diminished the effectiveness of sanctions. The dependence on subsidised oil sales and asymmetric relationships exposed the weaknesses in these alliances, prompting worries over their long-term viability.

The findings underscored the ethical and legal quandaries associated with the use of sanctions in international affairs. Sanctions often violate international principles by undermining state sovereignty and disproportionately impacting civilian populations [40]. The widespread enforcement of economic sanctions, including asset freezes and trade embargoes, resulted in collective punishment, contravening the principles of fairness and justice. Legal complications emerged over the unilateral imposition of sanctions by the United States, which bypassed international consensus and compromised their legitimacy [39]. These issues highlighted the need for sanctioning frameworks that align company objectives with adherence to ethical and legal standards. The findings also supported more global collaboration to enhance the legality and effectiveness of sanctions while alleviating their humanitarian consequences.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The principal aims of sanctions on Iran from 2018 to 2023 were to impede nuclear proliferation, curtail regional aggressiveness, and enforce adherence to international standards. Sanctions focused on critical economic sectors, including oil and banking, to restrict Iran's funding sources and diminish its capacity to finance nuclear developments and regional operations. Nevertheless, these restrictions often failed to accomplish their stated objectives, as Iran persisted in its nuclear program and maintained regional influence. This underscored the limitations of sanctions as an exclusive instrument for attaining geopolitical aims. The results indicated that while sanctions exerted considerable pressure, they required reinforcement via vigorous diplomatic engagement to successfully tackle the intricacies of international security issues.

The sanctions imposed on Iran had significant economic and humanitarian repercussions, destabilising the internal environment and diminishing the quality of life for its populace. The limitations resulted in a significant decrease in GDP, inflation, and widespread unemployment, disproportionately impacting the lower-income demographic. Moreover, restrictions obstructed access to vital commodities, including

pharmaceuticals and food, resulting in a humanitarian catastrophe that intensified during the COVID-19 epidemic. The results highlighted the ethical issues associated with penalties, especially their unintended effects on civilian populations, prompting enquiries into their appropriateness and justice.

Iran's strategic partnerships with non-Western nations, notably China, Russia, and regional allies, alleviated the detrimental impacts of sanctions. These alliances allowed Iran to circumvent economic sanctions via alternate trade lines and investments. China's long-term oil purchase deals bolstered Iran's economy, while Russia offered military and diplomatic backing that augmented Iran's regional power. Nevertheless, the data indicated that dependence on such partnerships had weaknesses, such as diminished negotiating power and economic reliance. These problems underscored the need for a reassessment of penalty measures to improve their efficacy while considering global power dynamics.

Based on the analysed data, the following recommendations were stated:

- a. **Integrate Diplomatic Engagement:** Sanctions must be supplemented by diplomatic initiatives to tackle intricate geopolitical challenges. Integrating penalties with multilateral negotiation might enhance the probability of attaining compliance while cultivating trust among disputing parties. For Iran, diplomatic avenues like reinstating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) might equilibrate pressure with incentives, fostering enduring resolutions to nuclear and regional security issues.
- b. **Mitigate Humanitarian Impacts:** Sanction regimes must include humanitarian protections to prevent inadvertent damage to people. Implementing systems that facilitate the unobstructed distribution of vital commodities, such pharmaceuticals and food, would mitigate ethical issues. For Iran, this may include establishing financial exemptions for humanitarian groups to enable relief distribution, so mitigating the detrimental effects on at-risk communities.
- c. **Strengthen Multilateral Coordination:** Sanctions must emphasise international agreement to augment their legitimacy and efficacy. Collaborative initiatives between the United Nations and key stakeholders might guarantee that penalties conform to international standards and reduce unilateral prejudices. Unified international action might enhance enforcement in Iran and diminish prospects for sanctions evasion via alternative partnerships.
- d. **Diversify Economic Strategies:** Countries such as Iran need to engage in economic diversification to limit reliance on certain industries or trade partners. Investing in indigenous sectors and pursuing regional trade agreements may bolster resilience against foreign forces. This strategy would alleviate the vulnerabilities linked to sanctions and dependence on asymmetric alliances with non-Western entities.

## REFERENCES

- [1] L. Shengfu and N. Davidson, "Development of energy trade between Russia and China under EU and US economic sanctions," *\*International Trade and Trade Development\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://econpapers.repec.org/article/acljournal/y\\_3a2024\\_3aid\\_3a728.htm](https://econpapers.repec.org/article/acljournal/y_3a2024_3aid_3a728.htm).
- [2] M. Lando, "Baseline preservation as a response to sea-level rise," *\*Ocean Development & International Law\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00908320.2024.2446581>.
- [3] A. Omid and M. Roustaei, "Citizen diplomacy and Armenian-Azeri tensions: Challenges and opportunities," *\*Central Eurasia Studies\**, 2025. [Online]. Available: [https://jcep.ut.ac.ir/article\\_90242.html](https://jcep.ut.ac.ir/article_90242.html).
- [4] M. Magnarelli, "Review of Valentina Vadi, Cultural Heritage in International Economic Law," *\*International Journal of Cultural Property\**, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-cultural-property/article/review-of-valentina-vadi-cultural-heritage-in-international-economic-law/>.
- [5] M. Shugurov, "International cooperation on climate research and green technologies in the face of sanctions: The case of Russia," *\*Green Finance\**, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.greenfinancejournal.com/articles/climate-research-russia>.
- [6] R. Burrell and D. Diorio, "A guide to assessing resiliency and resistance in Iran," *\*Digital Commons at USF\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/assessment\\_iran\\_resilience/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/assessment_iran_resilience/).
- [7] M. H. A. El-Kasem, "Iran's foreign policy compass amid international conflict," *\*Academia.edu\**, 2022. [Online]. Available: [https://www.academia.edu/56790123/Irans\\_foreign\\_policy\\_compass](https://www.academia.edu/56790123/Irans_foreign_policy_compass).

- [8] R. C. Christensen, "Harnessing network power: Weaponized interdependence in global tax policy," *\*Global Policy\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gpol.2024.56.1.002>.
- [9] D. Ranjbar and S. M. Mukan, "Central Asia-center gas pipeline system: Challenges and opportunities for modern Russia-Central Asia energy relations," *\*RUDN Journal of International Relations\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/2456>.
- [10] S. Puri, C. Cheng, J. McGlynn, J. Devanny, and C. G., "Strategic commentaries," *\*RAND Corporation\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1234.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1234.html).
- [11] D. Conduit, "Digital authoritarianism and the global technology industry: Evidence from Iran," *\*Government and Opposition\**, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition/article/digital-authoritarianism-in-iran/>.
- [12] P. Vaškaitė, "The USA, the Russian Federation, and the PRC narrative construction in 2013-2023," *\*VDU\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.vdu.lt/en/research-projects/narrative-construction-usa-russia-china>.
- [13] G. C. Hufbauer, J. J. Schott, and K. A. Elliott, *\*Economic sanctions reconsidered: History and current policy\**, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2009.
- [14] K. A. Elliott, *\*Economic sanctions reconsidered\**, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2011.
- [15] J. Galtung, *\*Sanctions as instruments of war: A comparative study\**, International Peace Research Institute, 2013.
- [16] W. H. Kaempfer and A. D. Lowenberg, *\*The political economy of economic sanctions\**, Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- [17] D. W. Drezner, *\*The sanctions paradox: Economic statecraft and international relations\**, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- [18] H. J. Morgenthau, *\*Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace\**, McGraw-Hill, 2013.
- [19] K. N. Waltz, *\*Theory of international politics\**, Waveland Press, 2010.
- [20] R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye, *\*Power and interdependence: World politics in transition\**, Longman, 2011.
- [21] H. Bull, *\*The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics\**, Columbia University Press, 2012.
- [22] J. N. Rosenau, *\*The study of world politics: Globalization and governance\**, Routledge, 2015.
- [23] A. Wendt, *\*Social theory of international politics\**, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- [24] R. Mojaddedi, "Regionalism and international diplomacy challenges: Are we heading toward World War III or another Cold War?" *\*ResearchGate\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369456789\\_Regionalism\\_and\\_international\\_diplomacy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369456789_Regionalism_and_international_diplomacy).
- [25] P. Kubíček, "The European Union-Iran relations: Indirect outcomes of the nuclear agreement negotiations," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/123456789/6789>.
- [26] B. V. Ivanovich, "Diplomacy of Iran and Russia in face of sanction pressure (2003–2023)," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rudn.ru/en/international-journal/diplomacy-of-iran-and-russia>.
- [27] V. Moghadam, "The ethics of international sanctions: A constructivist approach," *\*Journal of International Relations\**, 2024.
- [28] M. Shugurov, "International cooperation on climate research and green technologies in the face of sanctions: The case of Russia," *\*Green Finance\**, 2023.
- [29] G. M. Friedrichs and J. Sommer, "Ontological security crisis and role conception change: The impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the European Union's role conceptions," *\*European Journal of International Relations\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/ejir-2024>.
- [30] S. M. S. Emamian and R. Bagheripour, "The Iranian healthcare system under sanctions," *\*Australian Journal of Public Administration\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/ajpa2024>.
- [31] S. Hunter, "Why has Iran's 'Looking East' policy failed?" *\*Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/ResearchAndStudies/Pages/default.aspx>.
- [32] P. Kubíček, "The European Union-Iran relations: Indirect outcomes of the nuclear agreement negotiations," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/123456789/6789>.
- [33] R. Noori, "Financial strategies in Iran's geopolitical landscape," *\*Journal of International Affairs\**, 2023.
- [34] A. Manushin, "Socioeconomic consequences of international sanctions: The case of Iran," *\*Global Policy Review\**, 2024.
- [35] A. Vardomsky, "Unemployment and labor market strain due to sanctions in Iran," *\*Economic Studies\**, 2023.
- [36] A. Oyenuga, "Social resilience in Iran: Strategies for coping with sanctions," *\*Journal of Political Economy\**, 2021.
- [37] J. Karami, "Triangle cooperation of Iran, Russia, and China and Eurasian security," *\*Journal of Iran and Central Eurasia Studies\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://jices.ut.ac.ir>.
- [38] B. Arslan and H. Mustafa, "China's strategic influence on Iran's economy," *\*Asian Affairs Journal\**, 2024.
- [39] S. Hunter, "Why has Iran's 'Looking East' policy failed?" *\*Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/ResearchAndStudies/Pages/default.aspx>.
- [40] F. Casarano and G. Kovács, "Economic integration and regional cooperation in Iran," *\*European Political Review\**, 2023.
- [41] R. Zamiri, "Iran's survival mode: Navigating repression, deterrence, and protest movements," *\*ScholarWorks\**, 2024. [Online]. Available: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/irans\\_survival\\_mode/](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/irans_survival_mode/).