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Abstract

Wars and conflicts have been redefining international politics. Engaging in conflicts elicits many reactions from different nations throughout the globe, and one such reaction is the use of sanctions to restrict the exacerbating rivalries. In the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukraine War, the ineffectiveness of sanctions may be attributed to the regime type in Russia and the intricate interplay between various strategic elements. Multiple variables have contributed to this outcome. Russia's ability to withstand from challenges, together with its effective measures in reaction to enforced sanctions, is assumed to be primarily its national will and resilience. The paper is to examine the efficacy of sanctions in settling the war, specifically focusing on the instance of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Additionally, it seeks to assess the efficiency of sanctions put on Russia in 2014 besides endeavoring to reveal the aspects that contribute towards making penalties inter-alia sanctions effective and pragmatic.

Keywords: Russo-Ukraine War, International sanctions, Russia's Resilience, Sanctions Effectiveness, Conflict Resolution

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Assessing the Efficacy of Sanctions in Conflict Resolution Evolution: A Case Study of Russo-Ukraine War

Abstract

Wars and conflicts have been redefining international politics. Engaging in conflicts elicits many reactions from different nations throughout the globe, and one such reaction is the use of sanctions to restrict the exacerbating rivalries. In the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukraine War, the ineffectiveness of sanctions may be attributed to the regime type in Russia and the intricate interplay between various strategic elements. Multiple variables have contributed to this outcome. Russia's ability to withstand from challenges, together with its effective measures in reaction to enforced sanctions, is assumed to be primarily its national will and resilience. The paper is to examine the efficacy of sanctions in settling the war, specifically focusing on the instance of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Additionally, it seeks to assess the efficiency of sanctions put on Russia in 2014 besides endeavoring to reveal the aspects that contribute towards making penalties inter-alia sanctions effective and pragmatic.

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Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Theoretical Framework](#)
- [The Rationale of Sanctions in International Law](#)
- [Classifications of Sanctions](#)
- [Key Determinants of the Effectiveness of Sanctions](#)
- [Synergizing Sanctions with Conflict Resolution](#)
- [An Appraisal of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Role of Sanctions](#)
- [Efficacy of Sanctions in Russia-Ukraine Conflict](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

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Introduction

The confrontation between Russia and Ukraine is rooted in strong political, cultural, and historical underpinnings. The relative histories of the two countries are closely interconnected and span over a thousand years, dating back to the time when Kyiv, the present-day capital of Ukraine, was the center of the first Slavic state (Conant, 2023). Ukraine had a vital sustaining role for the Soviet Union during the Cold War being the second most populous and influential republic among the fifteen

Soviet republics. It included substantial agricultural output, defense industry, and military resources, such as the Black Sea Fleet and a portion of the nuclear weapons, which made it a pivotal participant in the geopolitical competition with the United States (Masters, 2023). Ukraine achieved independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nonetheless, the transition to democracy and capitalism encountered difficulties as a result of significant rifts among individuals holding contrasting views on Russian imperial and Ukrainian national identities (Masters, 2023). In 2014, Russia

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forcibly annexed Crimea, a region of Ukraine, into its territory, which led to extensive global criticism and heightened hostilities between the two countries. This event was the first incorporation of a European state since the conclusion of World War II, resulting in a substantial alteration in the worldwide security paradigm. In 2022, the conflict escalated when Russian troops invaded Ukraine, resulting in an intense war in Europe characterized by significant casualties and extensive displacement of civilians since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, which has led to significant ramifications for the region and beyond (Walker, [n.d.](#)).

War between Russia and Ukraine is a major development in international politics and security. Russia began its military campaign against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. In response, Europe and the US imposed sanctions on Russia immediately to deter it from continuing the offensive strike and to prevent the situation from getting worse. The political, economic, and cultural spheres are all impacted by sanctions, which are a collection of punitive measures imposed by states on their enemies or potential threats (Michaelsen, [n.d.](#)). A variety of goals are served by penalization, ranging from expressing despair to requesting a policy shift in the state in question. None of these goals are rigidly tied to a particular outcome. One of the most important tools of foreign diplomacy and politics is the use of sanctions. In a highly linked and globalized society, when instability in one area significantly impacts the entire world, the imposition of such sanctions takes on a far greater significance (Smeets, [2008](#)). In this study, we look at the question of whether sanctions ever work to achieve their aims. On the other hand, are they truly a viable option for ending the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or any other kind of conflict?

Theoretical Framework

The institutional theory of sanctions proposed by David Lektzian and Mark Souva ([2007](#)) in the Journal of Conflict Resolution article "Institutional Theory of Sanctions Onset and Success", is the most relevant and appropriate theoretical perspective for understanding sanctions' effectiveness or failure. Proponents divide sanctions disputes into three categories: punitive measures, demands or interests, and institutions. This theory combines the punishment theory of penalties (where penalties are perceived as punishment) with the expressive theory of sanctions (where sanctions are intended to express interests). The notion of punishment and sanctions states that penalties will succeed if they cost the targeted state a lot (Galtung, [1967](#)). Thus, harsher consequences work better. Another punishment hypothesis holds that multilateral punishments work better than unilateral ones (Martin, [1992](#)). The expressive approach claims that penalties are used to please local

domestic interest groups rather than changing the target state, and whether these sanctions affect the aim or not, their success relies on the imposing state's leaders' ability to win local support (Baldwin, [1985](#)). The institutional sanctions theory blends punishment and expressive theories. Sanctions as punishment may affect policies in the target state. It also promotes local interest groups and domestic politics.

The institutional theory of sanctions analyses what makes penalties work or fail. This theory holds that punishments are linked to the state's political structures. According to this idea, sanctions are more effective in democratic states but less likely in non-democratic states (Lektzian and Souva, [2007](#)). This notion links sanctions' efficacy to the targeted country's internal institutions and political system. Sanctions work best when they cost the targeted country's leadership 'a lot' while on the contrary, in non-democratic regimes, leaders want to stay in power as long as possible and achieve this by placating a limited number of elites (Masquita et al, 1999). This theory suggests that sanctions are less effective on non-democratic governments with reduced sender-target interdependence.

David Lektzian and Mark Souva ([2007](#)) offered several critical data to support their claim. *First*, they claim that penalties force the targeted state's government to increase economic benefits. In a democracy, this would lower the leader's popularity, making it hard for them to stay. If a non-democratic leader extracts economic gains, they gain power and stay in government. The *second* reason is that the identification of those facing penalties determines how well they work. Sanctions must target the winning coalition, which includes crucial supporters who help a leader or government stay in office. This shows that democratic regimes, where the leader has wide support, are more sensitive to sanctions since penalties affect the socioeconomic groups considerably (Lektzian and Souva, [2007](#)). In non-democratic regimes, sanctions only work if they target the leader's coalition, usually a few elites. In addition to political institutions, military institutions affect sanctions' effectiveness. This theory also states that democratic countries' sanctions are more likely to succeed than non-democratic nations', which are predicted to fail (Drezner, [1998](#)).

Application of the institutional theory of sanctions may explain prior sanctions' efficacy on Russia. Russia became a democracy when the Soviet Union collapsed, although it is still considered to be a restricted democracy (Tsygankov, 2014). Some say Russia is a well-established authoritarian regime. Elections and political parties are democratic in Russia; however, non-democratic constraints limit some liberties (Zavadskaya, [2023](#)). President Vladimir Putin's victorious alliance includes a select group of influential people, including the state-controlled media, the obedient military and security

forces, a compliant judiciary, a pliable opposition, business elite support, and dominance over key industries (Freedom House, 2023). This system shows that Russia is not truly democratic. According to the institutional theory of sanctions, Russia's government and institutions make sanctions less likely to succeed. Because non-democratic governments may manipulate resources and information thus the penalties are likely to be less effective. These factors are the reasons behind the resilience that Russia is exhibiting in the wake of its offensive against Ukraine which is still going on with no chance of cessation of war in sight.

The Rationale of Sanctions in International Law

Sanctions are generally seen as punitive actions implemented in response to a perceived violation of an international commitment, either by an international organization, a group of nations, or individual states against enemies or perceived dangers (Jessen, 2021). These actions are applied on diplomatic, commercial, and cultural levels between the countries concerned. Sanctions play a crucial role in International law since they are one of the acceptable mechanisms that governments may use to resolve disputes without violating the law or being seen as illegitimate (*What Are Sanctions, Do They Ever Work – and Could They Stop Russia's Invasion of Ukraine?*, n.d.).

Sanctions serve several aims, which might vary from expressing despondency to demanding policy change in the targeted state (Smeets, 2008). They are not limited to a single or inflexible purpose. Sanctions are seen as a crucial component and instrument of international policy and diplomacy. The primary goals of sanctions are to limit the strategic options accessible to the organizations being targeted, modify their conduct, and publicly condemn individuals seen to constitute a risk to world peace and security (*International Sanctions*, 2024). The purpose of these efforts is to deter actions that pose a threat to global stability and promote diplomatic resolutions.

Classifications of Sanctions

Various forms of penalties may be enforced on the targeted nation. Economic sanctions include the cessation of normal trade and financial transactions, typically motivated by foreign and security policy goals (Masters, 2019). These restrictions may be implemented as comprehensive sanctions, which limit business activity affecting the whole of a country, as seen by the ongoing US embargo on Cuba. Alternatively, penalties might be focused on delaying transactions that involve specific firms, organizations, or persons – known as targeted sanctions or smart sanctions. Comprehensive sanctions refer to a kind of restrictive measures that include wide-

ranging trade restrictions and prohibit any economic transactions with a whole nation. Illustrations of comprehensive sanctions include actions such as those enforced by the United States on nations like Iran and Cuba. In contrast to the broad-ranging comprehensive sanctions, targeted sanctions specifically limit transactions involving certain persons or businesses.

Sectoral sanctions, which are a kind of targeted sanctions, specifically target certain areas within the economy of the entity being sanctioned. Illustrations of this phenomenon include the US imposition of sanctions pertaining to Somalia, specifically directed at people who posed a danger to its stability (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2020). Supplementary sanctions, also known as secondary sanctions, are aimed at third parties that provide support or assistance to regimes that have been subjected to sanctions. An example of this is when the US Treasury implemented sanctions in February 2017 on organizations that were engaged in Iran's ballistic missile program. Targeted sanctions are sometimes referred to as smart sanctions.

Additionally, there are multilateral sanctions, which include many countries collectively imposing restrictions, and unilateral penalties, which are imposed by a single country. Multilateral sanctions are enforced by a coalition of states or international organizations in response to a common concern or problem. This cooperative method entails the synchronization and consensus among several nations, often enabled by international organizations such as the United Nations or regional alliances (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, n.d.). These are alternatively referred to as International Sanctions. Unilateral sanctions refer to the enforcement of restrictive actions by a single country without the direct collaboration or agreement of other states. Unilaterally imposed sanctions are intended to further foreign policy goals without the backing of the international community. Multilateral sanctions are seen as superior to unilateral ones in exerting pressure on the target state (Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1999). Individual sanctions refer to the application of economic and commercial penalties by a single country against a particular person. These penalties are purposeful economic and political measures designed to restrict certain behaviors shown by a person. Sanctions may include measures such as freezing assets and imposing travel restrictions (Unit 21, n.d.). In addition to these, there are several more categories of penalties, such as Diplomatic sanctions, sports sanctions, military sanctions, cultural sanctions, and environmental restrictions.

The types of sanctions that Russia is facing as a consequence of its attack on Ukraine include financial sanctions or economic sanctions which encompass Russia (7 banks of Russia) being excluded from SWIFT thereby denying its access to the international market (Perez,

2022). Another financial sanction that has been imposed on Russia pertains to trade restrictions where various goods from Russia have been banned that inter-alia technology and luxury items (EU, [n.d.](#)). Investment restrictions are also imposed on Russia (Gov.UK, 2024). Apart from this, Central banks, major companies, and people close to Putin's assets have been frozen in Western countries (Al Jazeera, 2023). Travel bans for the key persons involved have also been rolled out against Russia (Current Time, 2023). Apart from this, buying natural gas and oils from Russia has also been banned.

Key Determinants of the Effectiveness of Sanctions

The factors that contribute to the effectiveness of sanctions are based on the institutional theory of sanctions. Given the relatively low cost and affordability of sanctions compared to military actions, many countries aim to compel their opponents to alter their conduct by implementing sanctions; however, it is crucial to evaluate the adversary's ability to evade the sanctions and identify an efficient method to overcome them in order to achieve successful outcomes (Maximilian, Teichmann, & Wittmann, 2022). This is to strengthen the chances of sanctions being effective.

Another determinant of the efficacy of sanctions is the significant political and economic burden they impose on the opposing party. If the sanctions impose a significant financial burden on the targeted state, there is a possibility that they may ultimately achieve their intended goals (Hufbauer et al, 2009). However, the effectiveness of sanctions is not exclusively determined by the significant economic and political consequences, they impose. There are several variables that contribute collectively. An important element is the regime type of the state being targeted, as proposed by the institutional theory of sanctions. If this is to be related to Russia's war against Ukraine, the imposed sanctions indeed have a significant cost for Russia, but despite this fact, Russia is standing firm on its stance. It is because of various factors that are at play behind the scenes.

The targeted regime has a significant impact on influencing the effectiveness of penalties in achieving the intended purpose (Marineau, 2020). Sanctions are more likely to be effective in achieving their goals when imposed on a democratic state with weak institutions. However, if the state has strong institutions, sanctions will face challenges in achieving success (Lektzian and Souva, 2007). In general, democratic states are more susceptible to the impact of sanctions compared to non-democratic or authoritarian states, as they possess greater resilience towards sanctions. In the case of Russia Ukraine war, as already mentioned, Russia is a managed democracy that has a great deal of elements of

authoritarianism. This, in a way, strengthens the position of the authoritarian leader.

Complex interdependence is an additional component that influences the outcome of penalties. The institutional theory of sanctions posits that as complex interdependence increases, the effectiveness of sanctions decreases due to the significant costs incurred by both the target or adversary and the imposing state (Lektzian and Souva, 2007). International coherence is a crucial factor that enhances the effectiveness of penalties. If the majority of partners implement penalties, it is quite probable that the target will suffer significant losses, making it more susceptible (Mayall, 1984). If some partners regress from enforcing penalties, the effectiveness of the restrictions will likewise be diminished. If sanctions against Russia in the backdrop of Russian Russian-Ukraine war are to be analyzed through the prism of complex interdependence, it is easy to comprehend that complex interdependence is working both ways. It is not only Russia that is interdependent on the world; rather many Western states (western European states) are dependent on Russia for natural oil and gas. This affects not only Russia but Western states alike because of interdependence which is of course complex.

Synergizing Sanctions with Conflict Resolution

Sanctions may aid in conflict resolution by providing a peaceful method to reduce a country's military capabilities, thereby preventing a major increase in bloodshed during a war. In addition, they may facilitate the involvement of warring parties in negotiations, promoting the convergence of viewpoints of each party's skills, reducing the attractiveness of attaining triumph, and intensifying the expenses linked to extending the dispute (Folch, 2010). It is crucial to acknowledge that while sanctions may serve as a potent tool in achieving peace, they can also hinder peace-building efforts by obstructing peace processes, post-conflict reconciliation, and peace accords (International Crisis Group, 2023). The effectiveness of sanctions in resolving disputes; thus, depends on several factors and the specific circumstances in which they are implemented.

The outcome of sanctions, whether successful or unsuccessful, is not a straightforward matter. It is influenced by multiple factors that collectively determine the effectiveness and value of the imposed sanctions. Any single aspect cannot be attributed exclusively as the cause of success or failure. Upon examining the ineffective penalties, we can see that these instances are consistent with the Institutional theory of sanctions. For instance, the UN, the US, and other nations such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the European Union have implemented stringent sanctions on North Korea. These measures have significantly impacted the North Korean economy, while their overall efficiency remains a subject

of controversy (Council of Foreign Relations, 2022). Despite the pressure, sanctions have failed to convince it to pursue the disarmament, North Korea continues to conduct nuclear and missile tests in response to the sanctions, showing no inclination to denuclearize (Feffer, 2020). The imposition of sanctions has effectively persuaded the government to see the development of a nuclear weapons program as essential. North Korea is an autocratic regime and is resolutely opposing sanctions in accordance with the institutional theory of sanctions.

Similarly, the economic sanctions placed by the US on Iraq are usually seen as ineffective. The sanctions, after being in place for almost a decade, not only failed to accomplish their goals but also resulted in severe humanitarian consequences for the Iraqi people, while also proving ineffective in influencing the actions of the Iraqi government (Andrews, 2023). The ineffectiveness of sanctions and the resulting humanitarian situation have prompted widespread condemnation. Moreover, in yet another example, the economic sanctions placed by the US on Iran have been mostly considered a failure. The sanctions have been ineffective in achieving their intended goal, as Iran also continues to advance its strategic missile and nuclear programs and expand its influence across the Middle Eastern region (Drezner, 2020). In addition, Iran has effectively shielded its economy, mitigating the adverse effects of sanctions, and is effectively collaborating with other nations such as Russia, despite the pressure (Basha, 2022).

The US sanctions imposed on Cuba likewise proved ineffective in attaining the intended results. The US sanctions on Cuba, implemented since 1962, have been largely seen as ineffective. Despite its protracted duration, the embargo has failed to accomplish its stated objectives and has instead exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe in Cuba. The restrictions implemented by President Kennedy have mostly been futile in altering Cuba's policy (Oliver and Venancio, 2022). The fundamental impacts of the embargo have persisted throughout time, despite many administrations' attempts to modify the policy, such as lifting restrictions on Cuban Americans and resuming diplomatic relations with Cuba (Rhodes, 2022). The embargo has encountered substantial criticism. Upon thorough examination, it becomes evident that all unsuccessful instances are providing support for the principles of the institutional theory of penalties.

Russia is a further addition to the list of unsuccessful sanctions since it has shown a level of resilience that has lessened the impact of sanctions to a great extent. The ineffectiveness of sanctions can aptly be understood in the light of the institutional theory of sanctions. Russia has always resorted to robust and well-planned strategies in the face of imposed sanctions which have acted as a buffer thus mitigating the harsh consequences of restrictions on Russia. It is not that Russia is totally safe

from the consequences, it has faced its own fair share of loss in its economy, but still, sanctions have proven ineffective in pushing Russia out of Ukraine.

An Appraisal of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Role of Sanctions

Russia is facing an expansion of international sanctions that include its banking, energy, defense, and technological sectors. These sanctions also include specific actions taken against the oligarchy, which refers to the influential group of individuals who support Putin's leadership. Significantly, certain Russian banks have been barred from the SWIFT system by the United States and several European nations, therefore restricting financial transactions (Masters, 2023). Further limitations are restricting Russia's ability to access international financial assets and placing its central bank on a blacklist. Notable Western corporations such as the European Union are abandoning or halting their activities in Russia, while the Group of Seven (G7) permanently suspended Russia in 2014. In February, Germany postponed regulatory clearance for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, while operations for Nord Stream 1 were halted in August, and as a consequence, the supply of natural gas to the European market has been affected (Masters, 2023). U.S. and Ukrainian authorities, along with critics, expressed apprehensions about Russian political influence in relation to Nord Stream 2.

Efficacy of Sanctions in Russia-Ukraine Conflict

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and then launched a military invasion against Ukraine in February 2022. Predictably, Russia's action elicited a range of reactions from nations throughout the globe. Amidst the abundance of reactions, one notable response was the implementation of sanctions on Russia by many governments, notably the US, the EU, and their allies. The United Nations also implemented sanctions. Russia has been subjected to over 5000 sanctions, making it the most heavily sanctioned state in history (Schwab, 2022). As stated in the preceding section, the sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 were ineffective. Consequently, a pertinent inquiry arises: does the current situation in 2024 mirror the prior circumstances, or has it undergone a transformation? Reportedly, the sanctions imposed in response to the 2022 offensive attack exhibit a distinct characteristic: a coordinated effort involving not only the US and the European Union, but also other nations such as Japan, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada, who are collectively projecting the sanctions (Geiger, 2022). However, while presenting a unified stance, the sanctions have not had a significant impact in compelling Russia to cease the offensive. The fight continues unabated.

It is crucial to acknowledge that every event is occurring within the context of Globalization and intricate interconnectedness, where governments are intricately reliant on one another. The mutual dependency between countries is hindering the complete cessation of commerce with Russia, since the governments enforcing sanctions themselves depend on Russia for its natural gas, oil, and raw material requirements (Jin & Meng, 2023). Lektzian and Mark Souva's work (2007) on establishing an institutional theory of sanctions similarly emphasizes the impact of dependency on diminishing the effectiveness of sanctions. Prior to the commencement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the world economy was already in a state of upheaval because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the situation further deteriorated with the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine (Qureshi et al, 2022). The invasion had an immediate and significant effect on financial markets, causing a sharp decline (Marcos & Nelson, 2022). The second issue was the escalation of costs in the energy industry (Black, 2022).

In light of the seriousness of the situation, the United States promptly responded by implementing sanctions on Russia. These restrictions included limitations on the 10 biggest financial institutions in Russia, which together hold over 80% of the country's banking assets (The White House, 2022). In addition, some prominent financial institutions also terminated their activities in Russia as a means to dissuade Russia from escalating the offense (BBC News, 2022).

However, the crucial inquiry is to the efficacy of these penalties in resolving and managing the conflict. The assertion that the sanctions against Russia are unprecedented appears to be an exaggeration and unfounded when considering the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq and Iran since in both cases, the targeted countries experienced the immediate freezing of all assets and a complete oil boycott. Alternatively, one may examine the history of US sanctions imposed on Russia and its predecessor, the USSR, which is replete with instances of failed sanctions. Examples include the grain embargo during the Afghan invasion and the limitations placed on technology transfer during the Cold War. This historical account is replete with analogies; yet, it is regrettable that the Western governments have failed to glean the intended lesson from the Russian assault in 2014 (Van Bergeijk, 2022).

The ineffectiveness of penalties may be elucidated by examining the institutional theory of sanctions, which has been thoroughly covered in the paper. The ineffectiveness of sanctions in the case of Russia can be justified by the theory that state sanctions are more likely to be effective and successful when imposed on a

democracy with weak institutions. However, this theory does not apply to Russia, as it is considered a managed democracy with elements of democracy in the form of democratic institutions, but ultimately authoritarian in nature. Furthermore, Russia has highly controlled institutions that allow the leader in power to manipulate the situation and extract resources from the population to maintain their rule. Russia has shown its enduring might on several occasions throughout history.

Succinctly, it can be stated that unlike democracies susceptible to internal dissent, the regime effectively controlled information and suppressed public discontent, preventing internal pressure from translating into policy change. Moreover, the lack of universal adherence and international coordination weakened the sanctions' impact. Key players like China and India emerged as alternative trade partners, mitigating the intended isolation.

Conclusion

Sanctions are non-violent measures used to affect the conduct of a targeted state and persuade it to modify its policies in favor of the imposing powers. Penalties include several categories, such as economic, diplomatic, political, and military penalties. Among them, economic sanctions are the most prevalent and frequently used due to their direct impact on the economy. Several researchers and scholars have extensively studied various aspects of sanctions, including their impacts and the responses of targeted states. However, there has been limited research on the factors that determine the success or failure of sanctions, as well as the role they play in resolving conflicts. This study has specifically focused on filling this research need. The whole debate and discourse around the choice of study has been guided by the somewhat obscure institutional theory of sanctions, as proposed by David Lektzian and Mark Souva in their research. This theory is very pertinent to the subject matter of this study as it focuses on investigating the efficacy of punishments and comprehending the underlying variables that contribute to their success or lack thereof.

The effectiveness of the sanctions imposed on Russia has determined that these sanctions have not succeeded in halting the ongoing conflict, which has continued unabated despite being sanctioned. The ultimate resolution of the conflict remains uncertain as it continues to persist without any immediate signs of being resolved in the foreseeable future. However, it is evident that the prolonged duration of the dispute will result in the deterioration of not only Russia's economy but also the global economy due to intricately interconnected supply chains and interdependence among all nations.

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