

1979

Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia

Robert I. Rotberg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Rotberg, Robert I. (1979) "Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 1 , Article 34.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss1/34>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

PROFESSIONAL READING 123

Stern, Ellen, ed. *The Limits of Military Intervention*. Beverly Hills/London: Sage, 1977. 399pp.

Conventional wisdom holds that America's ability to employ military forces abroad now and in the years ahead is strongly influenced by the "Vietnam legacy." Yet the recent spate of books on Vietnam—although they have added much to our understanding of how American involvement came about—have failed to consider in any systematic way the implications of Vietnam for future foreign and defense policies. For the most part we are offered one of two quite superficial perspectives: the "never again" approach that ignores the possibility that the United States may have important interests and obligations abroad; and the "do it better next time" school that seems to accept uncritically the assumptions that led to American involvement in Vietnam some 30 years ago.

The Limits of Military Intervention, the 12th in a series of studies sponsored by the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, is a collection of 18 essays dealing with the issue of military intervention. The Vietnam experience, the authors suggest, is only one of a number of emerging limitations on the use of military force abroad. Other recent and ongoing developments—changes in the international system, new weapons technologies, the shrinking of America's overseas base systems, the shift to an all-volunteer force, and changes in congressional and public attitudes (partly the consequence of Vietnam)—also serve, individually and collectively, to impose restrictions on the use of military forces abroad. The conclusion, in the words of Ellen Stern, the editor, is that

The limits on . . . military intervention are real. The clearest and notably obvious conclusion . . . is that they are increasing. But the reality of the constraints does not negate the likelihood of particu-

larized military intervention. Crisis situations will arise where a military answer is deemed proper; but the decision makers will have to operate within a narrow scope and delimited time frame.

The essays in this book are uniformly excellent. The papers by Roger Hamburg, Davis B. Bobrow, and Caesar D. Sereseres are valuable in that they deal with subjects, such as command and control, that have not received a great deal of recent attention. Joseph J. Krusel's chapter, "Military Alerts and Diplomatic Signals," and Paul R. Schratz' essay, "National Decision Making and Military Intervention," provide particularly useful perspectives on policymaking and crisis management. Service readers concerned with carrying out military operations will find much of interest in the essays by John R. Pickett, Michael McCGwire, and Lewis S. Sorley. Sam C. Sarkesian's chapter, "Professional Problems and Adaptations," and John E. Mueller's essay, "Changes in American Public Attitudes toward International Involvement," offer especially good insights into changing professional and public perspectives on military intervention. Finally, Ellen Stern deserves special praise for keeping a diverse group of authors within a coherent framework of analysis and for her stimulating prologue to the book.

This book is exceptionally useful in helping to define the changing dimensions and limitations on military intervention. It fills an important gap in the literature and deserves the widest possible audience among those concerned with foreign and defense policies.

WILLIAM P. SNYDER
Texas A&M University

Strack, Harry R. *Sanctions: The Case of Rhodesia*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1978. 296pp.

Sanctions have not compelled white Rhodesians to end their rule. It has been

124 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

the barrel of a guerrilla-held gun, not the effect of a U.N.-sponsored boycott, that has driven white Rhodesians to negotiate with Africans and transform their minority into some kind of a majority regime.

If Strack had published *Sanctions* a few years ago, its message would have been clear: boycotts are impossible to maintain in a world where nations (whether of the West or the East blocs) and individuals trade. The mechanism of the market (which includes barter) has helped sustain Rhodesia. Before the cost of war rose and base metals prices fell in 1976, Rhodesia had in fact flourished behind the artificial barrier of sanctions.

There is a second message: Short of ringing a pariah country with troops or occupying its main air and rail stations, there is almost no way in which sanctions can be sustained over a period of years. If imports and exports cannot be halted in the first weeks or months, prime time is lost.

And a third: The threat of sanctions, if not immediately shown to be real and tough, has little likelihood of mandating the policy results that are desired and anticipated by outsiders. One of Strack's main conclusions from the Rhodesian case must be that sanctions are a blunt and unwieldy instrument. They never frightened white Rhodesians sufficiently to encourage more than strenuous and ingenious evasion.

There have been previous studies of Rhodesia since its declaration of independence in 1965 but none has so thoroughly examined the effect of international sanctions upon the economy of Rhodesia, and upon Rhodesia's policies regarding tourism, sport, international involvement generally, etc. Strack shows in some detail how Rhodesia managed to import and export—how such large, visible, and expensive items as diesel locomotives and jet aircraft were purchased overseas; how cotton became a major export commodity; how, in sum, the effects of sanction were easy to

cushion. If the United Nations had managed to sunder all communication facilities, however, the maintenance of international commerce would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Future boycotters should, Strack implies, quickly end most, if not all, postal and telegraph links between the outside world and the nation being boycotted.

In the case of Rhodesia only a few African states cut vital communication links. Britain tried halfheartedly to make postal ties more costly, and many nations sought to prevent international travel by Rhodesians. But these efforts were easy to circumvent, Rhodesians were adept at making mockery of artificial constraints, and, thanks mostly to Portugal and South Africa, Rhodesia proceeded merrily along its prosperous way despite (and sometimes because of) the effect of U.N. resolutions. Even the freezing of Rhodesian accounts in Britain and the United States proved beneficial to capital-hungry Rhodesia, which froze British assets inside Rhodesia and was relieved of the obligation of paying its international sterling debts.

Strack is exceptionally thorough in reviewing every ramification of sanctions. He devotes a chapter to Rhodesia's legal status, another to the theory of sanctions and its application to Rhodesia, a third to the ways in which Rhodesia avoided sanctions politically and diplomatically, a long chapter to all aspects of the economic effects (without benefit of recent research on the subterfuges used by subsidiaries of British and American oil companies knowingly to sell petroleum products to Rhodesia), and then shorter chapters to the ways in which sanctions destroyed Rhodesia's international sporting role but otherwise had little effect on tourism, transportation links, entertainment, labor migration, etc.

Such adjectives as solid, exhaustive, and well-researched describe *Sanctions*. They do too little justice to the care

PROFESSIONAL READING 125

with which the book was put together and the objectivity of the author. At the same time, Strack has been comparatively unimaginative, for the most part relying upon official sources, newspaper reports, and interviews with participants. He has hinted at but not investigated the official legerdemain that was necessary to combat sanctions and, with some minor exceptions, the elaborate subterfuges used by Rhodesians to minimize the bite of mandatory sanctions.

ROBERT I. ROTBERG
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Thompson, W. Scott. *Power Projection: A Net Assessment of U.S. and Soviet Capabilities*. New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1978 (Agenda Paper No. 7). 83pp.

Following a preface by Frank R. Barnett of the National Strategy Information Center and a foreword by Adm. E.R. Zumwalt, Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.), the author devotes the first chapter to his definition of "power projection." Necessary for understanding both the title and the remainder of the book, a very broad definition is given that includes "the overall capability to *develop an infrastructure of influence*" as well as "the capacity to *inject appropriate instruments of influence and force*" in distant areas. The focus is on power projection below the strategic nuclear level, although the author readily acknowledges that the credibility and effectiveness of projection at these lower levels are very much dependent on the state of the strategic nuclear balance.

The main theme of the book is that, although the United States still possesses projection capabilities superior to those of the U.S.S.R., a combination of increased Soviet capabilities, weakened Western alliances, Third World instability and lack of American will has established a trend in recent years that favors the interests of the Soviet Union. These factors are discussed in chapters 2

through 5 in an interesting manner, but the level of generality and admitted ambiguity inherent in some of the evidence make clear that the author's assessments are based more on perception than on rigorous empiricism and analysis.

In his treatment of the Third World, Thompson is impressed by Soviet successes in projecting influence and he credits them with understanding the desires of Third World leaders. Yet, he later presents a somewhat contrary view and claims most of these leaders would prefer not to be aligned with either superpower and that the Soviets might well be viewed as new colonialists. Indeed, given that short-term successes in the Third World could become mixed blessings and even be the cause of serious problems for the Soviets in the long run, it would seem that caution is in order on direct U.S. involvement in Third World turmoil. However, Thompson is very critical of the U.S. failure to take action in such places as Angola and assails what he calls the current "So-What School of American Foreign Policy." Of course, asking "So-What?" and then going on to give the answer is far better than automatic and unthinking responses to the many crises which occur. Indeed, it is probable that the question was asked in the case of Angola and that the answer was that costs of involvement were likely to outweigh the benefits to be gained.

The final chapter of the book is devoted to prescriptions for remedying the perceived adverse trend. These include: increased efforts to restore strategic parity; ensure retention of existing bases and basing rights; strengthen and coordinate our alliances; advocate non-alignment for the Third World and educate leaders of those states in the dangers of Soviet colonialism; and, of course, work to rebuild U.S. domestic consensus and will.

Both the problems he discusses and the prescriptions he presents are worthy