Chapter 10

The Logic and Limitations of Economic Sanctions

———Implications for North Korean Policy

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[Key Points]

➢ The fundamental objective of economic sanctions is to maintain and strengthen international norms, rather than forcing a specific action to be taken in the short term. The sanctions repeatedly imposed on North Korea have been imposed in part because the country has violated United Nations (UN) resolutions or UN norms.

➢ The first political objective of sanctions based on UN resolutions is to strengthen the UN’s authority and functions in respect of the maintenance of peace and safety. The second political objective is internal political unity, as such sanctions can have the effect of unifying domestic opinion and establishing a consensus within the major countries concerned. On the other hand, there are constraints on the effectiveness of economic sanctions and contradictions lurking within their policy objectives, as well as political limitations arising from the international situation.

➢ It would be fair to say that sanctions imposed on North Korea have, in some ways, actually helped to shore up domestic support and bolstered political unity, and have hardly shaken the North Korean regime at all. The effectiveness of economic sanctions depends on whether or not the international situation at the time presents strategic reasons pushing the countries concerned down the path of compromise. In the case of the North Korean issue, the fundamental question is, given the international situation regarding the Korean Peninsula, whether or not the countries concerned (including North Korea) can establish shared strategic interests.
The Effects and Limitations of Economic Sanctions

Purposes & Effects of UN Economic Sanctions
- Strengthen UN authority & functions for maintaining peace & safety
- Bolster internal political solidarity & unity among UN member countries
- Promote consensus/solidarity within relevant countries
- Influence domestic political balance of sanctioned country
- Preventive measures against specific actions
- Deterrent effect against third countries with similar problems

Constraints & Limitations of Sanctions
- Existence of non-compliant countries
- Existence of non-participating countries
- Effectiveness if alternative supplies are available
- Impact on ordinary citizens in sanctioned country
- Potential to destroy existing international economic order
- Concerns about spread of unique trade/economic networks or an “unseen order”

Source: Compiled by the author