

RETHINKING IRAN WITH YOUR CLASSROOM

# SANCTIONS CURRICULUM



COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCES TO HELP TEACH  
THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

# HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Looking for effective tools to teach about sanctions?

Check out the new Johns Hopkins University's SAIS Rethinking Iran Curriculum, meant to help students and teachers grapple with the complex issues surrounding the most ubiquitous US foreign policy instrument – sanctions.

From group discussions, to research projects, our classroom resources can easily be incorporated into pre-existing lesson plans. This material was made by teachers for teachers. So whether you are new to the topic or just looking for something fresh to add, these resources come complete with all the information needed to implement them including class discussion topics, links to research materials, assessments, and so on.

These lessons scaffold and are thus scalable to your classroom needs.

## LESSON OUTLINE

**LESSON 1 - WHAT ARE SANCTIONS**

**LESSON 2 - THE CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS**

**LESSON 3 - SANCTIONS: A CASE STUDY**

**LESSON 4 - LIVES LIVED UNDER SANCTIONS**

**LESSON 5 - THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF SANCTIONS**



# LESSON 1 - WHAT ARE SANCTIONS



## GOALS:

Economic sanctions have become the predominant strategy in American foreign policy. The objective of this lesson is to have students learn what sanctions are, how they are implemented, and gain a framework to evaluate their effectiveness and desirability.



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Depending on class size, students should form small groups of 3-5. Using the linked [CFR article](#), all students should read the first section: What are sanctions?

After that section, each student should choose one of the following sections:

- When are sanctions used?
- What is the sanctions process in the United States?
- What are extraterritorial sanctions?
- OPTIONAL: Do sanctions Work?
- OPTIONAL: What is the sanctions process in the UN?
- OPTIONAL: What is the sanctions process in the EU?

For the next five to ten minutes, students should read their respective section and prepare a short (approximately 2 minute) summary for their group.

After each student has shared their section summaries, groups should work collaboratively to research the pros and cons of sanctions. Each group should decide how to divide research responsibilities and how to present their arguments. Here are some suggested resources that can be used in this research:

[Rethinking Iran: Iran Under Sanctions](#)

[CEPR Report on Living Standards](#)

[CRS Report on Russia Sanctions](#)

[Foreign Policy Interviews](#)



## ASSIGNMENT:

On a sheet of paper, each group should create a T-chart listing at least five Pros and Cons for the use of sanctions. Below the T-chart, each group should articulate under what conditions, if any, the U.S. should use sanctions and what markers they feel should be used to determine if the sanctions are having a net positive or negative effect on the targeted country.

# LESSON 2 - THE CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS



## GOALS:

Economic sanctions can have a significant impact upon the everyday lives of those under affected governments. The objective of this lesson is to explore the unintended consequences of sanctions using Iran as a case study.



## INSTRUCTIONS:

A few days before, students should be divided into four to five groups with each group assigned one of the research areas listed below:

- Publishing ([Report/Video](#))
- Medicine ([Report/Video](#))
- Welfare & Employment ([Report/Video](#)) (Can be split between two groups)
- Environment ([Report/Video](#))



## ASSIGNMENT:

Each group should put together a five-to-ten-minute presentation summarizing the impact sanctions have had on their respective areas. Specific attention should be paid to the following questions:

1. How are sanctions impacting your research area?
2. What was the intended target/goal of those sanctions?
3. Do these consequences positively or negatively impact U.S. foreign policy goals?



## CLASS DISCUSSION:

Once all groups have presented their topic areas, discuss the impacts of sanctions and their overall cost-benefit. This can be done either as a class or by creating new groups consisting of one member from each research area. These talks should seek to engage the following questions:

1. How do these unintended consequences inform your assessment of U.S. sanctions?
2. In your assessment, can sanctions be more refined to avoid these effects? If so, how? If not, why?
3. Why is it important to look at the complexities that underly sanctions policies?

# LESSON 3 - SANCTIONS: A CASE STUDY



## GOALS:

Economic sanctions can profoundly affect the daily lives of people under targeted regimes. The objective of this lesson is to explore the unintended consequences of sanctions using [Iraq as a case study](#).



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Students will divide into five groups, each presenting one of the following perspectives:

- UN Sanctions Committee Members
- Iraqi Government Officials
- Humanitarian Aid Organizations
- Iraqi Citizens Impacted by Sanctions
- U.S. Foreign Policy Analysts



## ASSIGNMENT:

Groups should research their assigned perspectives using the [approved article](#), focusing on the impact of sanctions on daily life, economic goals, humanitarian crises, and long-term effects on infrastructure.



## CLASS DEBATE:

Each group will present their views in a moderated debate, addressing the following questions:

How did sanctions affect Iraq in your role's context?

Were the intended goals met from your perspective?

What could have been done differently?

## REFLECTION:

After the debate, students should discuss how their representation affected their understanding of the complexities and unintended consequences of sanctions.

# LESSON 4 - LIVES LIVED UNDER SANCTIONS



## GOALS:

Often sanctions seem to be an abstract and highly specialized foreign policy that only impacts targeted bad actors in rogue countries. The objective of this lesson is to show the complexities of sanctions by revealing the effects they have on the lived experience of the civilian population through relatable media.



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Either the day before or at the start of class, distribute the [Lives Lived Under Sanctions Comic](#). Either in small groups or as a class, discuss the comic and what it reveals about the everyday experience of people living under sanctioned governments. (Recommend using the Harkness Method for class discussions.)

Some topic areas to help promote conversation:

- Do all Iranians support their government? Do sanctions differentiate between supporters and the opposition?
- Why were sanctions harmful to Mehdi's efforts to support the reform movement in Iran?
- How did sanctions further isolate Iran (Business – Behzad, Students – Yasaman, Politics – Majid)? Did this further U.S. interests?
- Do sanctions promote pro-Western sentiments or anti-Western resentment?
- What happened to the reformist political candidates and voter turnout after the reimposition of sanctions under Trump's Maximum Pressure strategy?
- What do we learn about the impact of sanctions on Iranian social welfare through the story of Maryam?



## ASSIGNMENT:

Students should write down their findings and formulate an opinion about the impact sanctions have upon the population of a targeted country and how it effects the success or failure of the policy goals.

# LESSON 5 - THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF SANCTIONS



## GOALS:

Often, we consider sanctions idealistically – while strict they avoid war – and simplistically – a carrot-and-stick framework. This has allowed sanctions to become ubiquitous while leaving us uninformed of the costs and limited efficacy sanctions may have. The objective of this lesson is to complicate these modes of analysis to allow a more nuanced and accurate understanding that shows more completely the challenges faced by using sanctions as the primary foreign policy tool.



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Either as a class or in small groups, conduct the following two exercises. First, discuss the logic tree detailed below showing the procedural challenges involved in the execution of sanctions. Second, watch and discuss the videos about the consequences of overusing sanctions on the international stage.

## LOGIC TREE:

1. Are sanctions used on friendly or hostile countries?
2. Sanctions operate using a carrot-and-stick method of incentivization. What is the stick? What is the carrot?
3. What is required of the foreign country to lift sanctions?
4. Is there a political risk for a leader to lift sanctions on a hostile power
5. Does that risk increase or decrease the likelihood that sanctions will be lifted even on a compliant country?
6. What impact does that have on the incentive structure of sanctions? Why would the foreign power change behavior if the lifting of sanctions is politically unlikely?



## CLASS VIDEO DISCUSSIONS:

### VIDEO 1 (2min):

1. When did financial sanctions begin to become a ubiquitous tool of U.S. foreign policy?
2. What is the goal of financial sanctions?
3. What were the first two major targets of financial sanctions by the U.S.?

# LESSON 5 - THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF SANCTIONS (CONT.)



## CLASS VIDEO DISCUSSIONS (CONT.)

### [VIDEO 2 \(3min\):](#)

1. What are “secondary sanctions?”
2. What effects do secondary sanctions have on how the U.S. viewed by its allies?
3. If secondary sanctions make investments unlikely even when sanctions are lifted, what impact will this have on the effectiveness of sanctions?

### [VIDEO 3 \(3min\):](#)

1. Why do sanctions push countries to use non-Western financial methods (de-dollarization, alternative banking sources, and central bank digital currencies)?
2. Where is the focal point for alternatives to Western capital markets?
3. What are some consequences of the declining effectiveness of sanctions because of their overuse?

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