

Boycotts, sanctions and embargoes



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Boycotts, sanctions and embargoes have been used for a very long time by the government to maintain social order. Although their use is characterized by lack of democracy, autocratic leaderships as well as dictatorial leaderships, the three terms have come to be recognized as international tools of dealing with rogue nations especially when such are applied by the international community through world recognized bodies such as the UN.

While boycotts refer to the act of desisting from using a certain product of engaging in relationship with a given organization or individual it may also be applied to individuals such as presidents and political leaders as a means of coercing such to comply with the given code of conduct . Boycotts, sanctions and embargoes as applied to South Africa during the apartheid era were used as tools of suppressing the apartheid rule to recognize the rights of the blacks in South Africa. Boycotts, sanctions and embargoes are only effective if there is international solidarity on the dimension on which they can be applied.

For such tools can never be effective if applied in small proportions. Beginning in the late 1960s throughout to the early 1990s the international community put pressure on the apartheid rule in South Africa to recognize the rights of the blacks in South Africa. The successive handover of independence to South Africans can be partly attributed to the effectiveness of the boycotts, sanctions and embargoes. The history of boycotts, sanctions and embargoes can be traced back to the 1700s with colonial boycotts of British trade goods during the colonization of America by the Britains .

In the 1800 boycotts were evident and were successfully used as a tool to fight slave trade when different nations such as France, the Balkans and the

Americas called for their population to boycott and resist from buying goods or products originating from slave fields . This led to the colonial masters to understand the dissent and dislike of slave trade as a practice. This amongst other factors can be used to explain the eventual abolishment of slave trade in late 18th century.

Boycotts were used by the anti-apartheid movement in two folds, either as a threat or an actual action aimed at eliciting the desired reaction from the apartheid rule to hasten the hand over of independence to South Africa . The pervasive nature of the boycotts made the boycotts to be viewed by the apartheid movement as one of the effective tools in that whenever boycotts were called either from the international community or by the south Africans themselves it would deal a big blow to the smooth functioning of the apartheid government.

This was the desired effect on the government given the ability of boycotts to disrupt the normal functioning of government. For instance, the South African apartheid government depended on exports of products such as gold, diamond and uranium and therefore successful boycotts meant that the apartheid government would be denied the much-needed income to carry on its governance issues .

Boycotts were so effective in South Africa such that they are classified as one of the greatest factors which led to the fall of the apartheid regime considering the fact that South Africa relied on export of its goods to earn foreign exchange. The anti-apartheid in South Africa played a critical role in ensuring that the boycotts received international recognition hence the

reason why much of the campaigning was directed towards achieving official state sponsored international support.

International anti-apartheid movement as it applied to South Africa was founded on tenets such as the belief in the right of every human being to fundamental right to freedom, self-rule, the right to every state to be independent, the right to recognition and upholding of every people's culture and beliefs as well as the social and moral responsibility of the international community to fight apartheid irrespective of who practices it or who perpetrates it. The above tenets formed the basis for the international anti-apartheid movement and were consequential in the subsequent defeat of apartheid in South Africa.

International solidarity is manifested in the ability of nations of the world to join together and advocate for a common goal. In regard to an apartheid movement in South Africa solidarity was demonstrated in sanctions and embargoes enforced by the international community to fight apartheid. In that sense the international community shows the intention to decapitate the legal framework with apartheid rule upholds as a means of sustaining the economic dominance over people.

In the case of South Africa the Boers segregated Africa by making sure that the quality of education they received was insufficient to guarantee them good position in the labour market. This greatly relegated the natives to abject poverty in that they were economically not a match to the Boers. Apart from denial of access to education, the native South Africans were denied equal opportunities even in situations whereby they possessed equal qualifications to those of the whites. In addition, the apartheid rule dictated

where the Africans could own property as well as what kind of trade they could conduct.

This meant that economically, the Africans were at a disadvantage. At the policy level all policies were biased against the Africans and this meant that it was very hard for them to achieve the economic independence required to wage any meaningful 'war' against the mighty white rule. This shows how the Africans were incapable of successfully fighting apartheid on their own. Without international solidarity as demonstrated in the international apartheid movement the native South Africans would not have achieved independence.

Where the Africans lacked the economic power to fight apartheid, the international community showed solidarity by enforcing sanctions, which would greatly reduce the white's economic prowess. Pressure from the international community led to the call of boycotts and expulsion of South Africa from participating in the international sporting events. This was too much for the apartheid rule to bear as embargoes such as expulsion from world sporting events and the calls for boycotts of the consumer goods meant that South Africa was slowly drifting away from the international community.

Even before the official handover of independence to the South Africans the impact of the international community intervention was evident and by 1985 the apartheid rule started doing away with some apartheid practices such as forced ejections from homes, classification based on colour, as well as the denial of equal opportunities. As the internal resistance waged by the South Africans through their umbrella party ANC sufficed international relations

worsened as the sanctions, embargoes and boycotts were unbearable to the apartheid rule.

The support from the international community accorded to the native South Africans acted as a morale booster and as a result the native South Africans took the fight against apartheid a note higher as all social groups took to the fight. As a result of international solidarity in calling of the eradication of apartheid in south Africa, the natives regained confidence and the fight against apartheid changed tactics from confrontational needs to more subtle means such as freedom songs, as well as the use of black owned media to produce films which called for the end to apartheid .

In the contemporary society international solidarity contributes largely to political struggle. This takes other forms other than embargoes, boycotts and sanctions for instance, international recognition of democratically elected governments. For example, in the present day Somalia, it is the leadership, which gains international support, which enjoys credence and credibility. For instance, the Islam court government could not successfully lead in Somalia because it lacked the support of the international community.

International solidarity calling for the recognition of the democratically elected leadership lead to the ousting of the Islam courts' led government barely six months after it had seized power from yet another leadership; the tribal led government. The case of Somalia clearly shows that international solidarity can play a role in winning struggles not only the struggle against apartheid but also other struggles against terrorism, colonialism as well as dictatorial regimes.

However, there is a need for caution in how the international community plays its role when it comes to intervention in conflict situations. There is evidence that most international actions are informed by the leadership of specific groups as opposed to being informed by the need for impartiality, fairness and the observation of international law. The moment international community degenerates into a tool for certain groups in the struggle, the effectiveness of the international community to fight against oppression of a given people whether in apartheid, colonial or occupation.

The international community should base their support on any given group on merit but not other factors such as on the basis of friendship with the leadership of a given struggle movement. The international community has in the past made grave mistakes by supporting struggle leaders who later turned out to be no better than the oppressive powers. This can be clearly demonstrated in the case of leaders who have taken over from dictatorial regimes with the full support of the community only to turn out to be worse than the ousted regimes.

For the official leadership of any struggle to receive international support, it must clearly demonstrate its ability to end aggression once it takes power. Such official leadership must have put in place proper mechanism to deal with issues of poor governance, which often lead to difficulties in leadership once such a struggle movement, takes power. It is therefore paramount that the international community serves the role of a mediator rather than actively being involved in the political activities in any given struggle.

Sanctions, boycotts and arms embargoes have been criticized for going in contravention of freedom and autonomy of states especially in cases

whereby the sanctions, boycotts and embargoes are imposed on independent states for reasons ranging from; failure to honor some demands by donors which may not be in the best interest of such nations or in other cases where embargoes, sanctions and boycotts are solely motivated by the need to exert influence over a regime which has fallen out of touch with the wishes of western powers.

For instance, the world is currently witnessing a situation whereby there is a tendency by the United States of America to endorse boycotts and sanctions to nations which fail to support it or collaborate with it on fronts such as the war against terrorism. This leads to questions on how appropriate it is for the United States of America and other developed Nations to dictate to independent nations on how they can handle their internal affairs.

For example, the sanctions imposed on Iran solely on grounds that, the country is developing weapons of mass destruction are a clear indication of how sanctions, boycotts and embargoes can be imposed at will by the powerful nations to the detriment of militarily and economically weaker nations. This has been a cause of tensions in the Middle East region and it threatens to get worse and spill into an international conflict. Embargoes lead to the suffering of citizens whose country is brought under sanctions.

In addition, embargoes, sanctions and boycotts increase vulnerability for such a country to face external attacks if arms embargoes are imposed. The above clearly demonstrate that, in as much as sanctions, embargoes and boycotts are useful in containing the capacity of dictatorial regimes, apartheid regimes and rebel movements, if not well regulated, they can lead to atrocities against the people they are meant to protect or liberate. Where

sanctions, embargoes and boycotts are imposed haphazardly, citizens suffer. In addition, the countries under arms embargoes become more vulnerable to attacks.

In addition sanctions, arms embargoes, and boycotts can lead to heightened regional and international relations characterized by tensions. There is a need to de-emphasize the use of sanctions and embargoes and concentrate on other methods of intervention in times of crisis. While sanctions, embargoes and boycotts can create an opportunity for abuse of human rights, abuse of independence of states and unnecessary interference in the running of internal affairs of independent countries, other alternatives such as negotiations can work marvelously and cause less undesired effects.

In addition, an alternative such as diplomacy is less expensive to implement in the long run. Diplomacy is usually given a wide support by nations of the world compared to sanctions, boycotts and embargoes. For instance, although there are sanctions in place against the current regime in Zimbabwe specifically targeting the leadership of President Robert Mugabe, not every nation in the world supports the measure as some countries like China have gone ahead with healthy trade ties with Robert Mugabe.

This clearly indicates that, sanctions are not always ideal and must only be applied selectively as opposed to being applied blatantly. In conclusion, it is clear from the discussion above that international intervention in form of enforcing boycotts, sanctions and embargoes against the apartheid rule in South Africa was effective in the fight and eventual defeat of apartheid. The international campaign, which saw South Africa being banned from

participating in international sporting events as well as the calls for boycotts of South African products, was greatly successful as a tool to fighting apartheid.

At the center of the struggle against apartheid was the apartheid movement, which coordinated the anti-apartheid struggle and advocated for the imposition of embargo, sanctions and boycotts. The case of apartheid struggle is a clear demonstration of the power of international solidarity in relation to the politics of a particular struggle and how international solidarity can greatly influence the outcome of the given struggle. Reference Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*.

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