I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Kimberly Ann Elliott's response to my article "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work." I briefly restate the main findings of my original article and summarize Elliott's criticism of my work. I then show why Elliott's charges are not valid and why my conclusion—that there is little empirical support that economic sanctions can achieve ambitious foreign policy goals—still stands.

A simple question lies at the heart of the disagreement between Elliott and me: How robust is the evidence that economic sanctions work? Since 1985 the most influential work on this question has been Economic Sanctions Reconsidered by Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott (hereafter HSE). Reviewing the universe of sanctions from 1914 to 1990, HSE found that sanctions succeeded in 40 of 115 cases, or 34 percent of the total. This important study provided the empirical support for a significant shift in the scholarly consensus on the effectiveness of sanctions from marked pessimism in the 1960s and 1970s to qualified optimism in the 1980s and 1990s.

My article "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work" challenges the validity of HSE. I examined the 40 claimed successes and found that only 5 stand up. Eighteen were actually settled by either direct or indirect use of force; in 8 cases there is no evidence that the target state made the demanded concessions; 6 do not qualify as instances of economic sanctions; and 3 are indeterminate. If I am right, then sanctions have succeeded in only 5 of 115 attempts, and thus there is no sound basis for even qualified optimism about the effects of sanctions.

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Elliott makes four charges against my work in her response. First, she says that I wrongly characterize HSE’s position on the optimism-pessimism spectrum, and so I criticize a wildly optimistic straw man that does not in fact exist. Second, she claims that HSE and I ask different questions and employ different research designs and that these conceptual differences, not substance, account for most of the discrepancy in our results. Third, she claims that expropriation disputes, which I do not credit as instances of economic sanctions, should be counted. Fourth, in a short appendix, she disputes my interpretation of the facts in seven cases.

Calling an Optimist an Optimist

Elliott’s claim that I paint HSE as wild-eyed optimists, while their actual position “is not terribly different” from mine (p. 50), is not true. My article describes their position as one of qualified optimism. My overall assessment of their views reads: “Proponents of the new conventional wisdom are aware that sanctions have limits and do not always work, but, by and large, they believe that sanctions are often an efficient instrument for achieving important political goals.”

Furthermore, my assessment of HSE’s views is justified. Optimism and pessimism are relative concepts; whether one should be considered optimistic about a certain policy instrument depends in part on how one’s views compare with the judgments of others. Compared to sanctions scholars of the 1960s and 1970s and to me, HSE are optimistic about the utility of sanctions, and the difference here is wide, not trivial. A policy tool that has succeeded in 40 of 115 attempts must be considered a moderately robust arrow in a policymaker’s quiver. On the other hand, if sanctions have succeeded in only 5 of 115 attempts, as I claim, then they are a weak instrument. The title of Elliott’s response—“The Sanctions Glass: Half Full or Completely Empty?”—nicely captures the difference between us.

A good litmus test of HSE’s views on sanctions is the policy advice they offered during the Persian Gulf crisis, which was probably the most important public debate about sanctions in recent times. HSE’s position on the utility of sanctions against Iraq was in fact optimistic. For example, they wrote in the

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Washington Post one month before the war began that "only military power, [President George Bush and his advisers] warned, is certain to get Saddam Hussein's armies out. But sanctions can work—and under circumstances far less favorable than those present in the confrontation with Iraq." Days before the war started, they argued in the New York Times that their model predicted that "since the estimated cost to Iraq—48 percent of the gross national product—is so far beyond that observed in other cases, the initial results [of our model] placed the probability of success at nearly 100 percent. Even when the model is adjusted to account for Mr. Hussein's exceptionally tyrannical control, and the estimated cost is, say, halved to 24 percent of GNP, the probability of success remains above 85 percent." As recently as 1994, Elliott and Hufbauer argued that sanctions could become a more powerful tool in the future: "The question for the future is whether the members of the United Nations, by cooperating multilaterally, can replicate the economic leverage that the United States enjoyed in the early postwar period and restore the utility of economic sanctions—at least to a 50-50 win-loss record. The experience since 1990 suggests a qualified yes."  

Elliott Reinvents HSE

Elliott claims that "the primary difference between ourselves and Pape in assessing the effectiveness of sanctions comes about not because of a flaw or error in our analysis but because of differences in research design" (p. 52). Her claim has two parts. First, she maintains that we ask different questions: my study assesses the independent usefulness of sanctions, which I treat as an effective alternative to military force; the HSE study asks whether sanctions make military operations more effective. Second, Elliott argues that in cases where both sanctions and force are used, I set an unreasonably high standard for assigning any causal weight to sanctions.

THE QUESTION
Contrary to Elliott’s response, it is not true that my study and the original HSE study ask different central questions. In fact, both studies seek to identify the effectiveness of economic sanctions not as a complement but as a substitute for other instruments of statecraft. The introduction to Economic Sanctions Reconsidered makes clear that its purpose is to identify the power of sanctions separately from, not in combination with, other coercive instruments: “Skeptics question whether sanctions are an effective stand-alone instrument of foreign policy and whether the costs to the users of sanctions are worth the benefits derived. World leaders often find the most obvious alternatives to economic sanctions unsatisfactory—military action would be too massive, and diplomatic protest too meager. . . . Our purpose in this study is precisely to suggest conditions in which sanctions are most likely to achieve a positive benefit at a bearable cost.”7 Moreover, HSE’s criterion for measuring sanctions success explicitly seeks to isolate the effects of sanctions from the effects of other coercive tools: “The success of an economic sanctions episode [is] . . . the contribution made by the sanctions (as opposed to other factors, such as military action) to a positive outcome.”8 In further contradiction to Elliott’s response, Hufbauer noted in congressional testimony that the HSE study coded cases in which economic sanctions were employed but military force determined the outcome as failures for sanctions: “In several cases counted as failures . . . the sender country achieved its goal but military or covert measures swamped the impact of the sanctions.”9 Hufbauer even testified that the use of force did not make sanctions more effective: “Economic sanctions are often deployed in conjunction with other measures, such as covert action, quasi-military measures, or regular military operations. . . . Our findings reveal no correlation between the use of companion policies and increased effectiveness.”10

Thus it is apparent that both my study and the HSE study ask the same central question: How effective are economic sanctions not as a complement

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8. Ibid., p. 41. Actually, Elliott’s position in her response is inconsistent, because at one point she repeats her commitment to a competitive standard: “We explicitly take into account the presence of these other policies and call an episode a sanctions success only if sanctions—relative to these other tools—contributed at least modestly to the outcome.” Elliott, “The Sanctions Glass,” p. 52.
10. Ibid.
to force but as a stand-alone foreign policy instrument? If Elliott now wishes to argue that the HSE findings show that sanctions are most effective in augmenting the use of force, then the research design and the conclusions of the original HSE study must be changed.

**THE STANDARD**

Elliott claims that my standard for sanctions success is narrow because I "attribute policy success to economic sanctions only if it occurred in the absence of accompanying policies, such as military threats or covert action" (p. 51). Although Elliott is right that such a standard is unreasonable, she is wrong to argue that I used this standard. I did not.

The standard that Elliott attributes to me is flawed because it automatically counts any case involving the use of two or more foreign policy tools as a failure for sanctions. Given that sanctions are often used in conjunction with diplomacy and military pressures, this approach would unfairly stack the deck against sanctions. The best way to obviate this problem is to look at each case where sanctions were used with another instrument and assess whether sanctions were the critical component in causing the target state to change its behavior. Of course, overcorrecting for this error by crediting sanctions with success simply because they were used would overrate the effectiveness of sanctions.

To avoid both errors, my article credits sanctions with success if they met three criteria: "(1) the target state conceded to a significant part of the coercer's demands; (2) economic sanctions were threatened or actually applied before the target changed its behavior; and (3) no more-credible explanation exists for the target's change of behavior."\(^{11}\) Then, I develop detailed coding rules for assigning causal weight to economic sanctions in cases involving the most common alternative explanation, the use of force. Finally, I provide a lengthy appendix to explain my coding of each case.

As I noted in my article, the standards I use are substantially the same as those employed in the HSE study. The difference is in how they are applied to the evidence. Consider Elliott's discussion of Nigeria's sanctions against Biafra between 1967 and 1970: "we [HSE] agree that military force was decisive in determining the outcome, but we also believe that sanctions made a useful contribution by rendering the target's military capability less effective than otherwise" (p. 53). Given that Biafra held out for three years and did not

surrender until almost 200,000 Nigerian troops overran it, coding this case as one of 40 successes for economic sanctions is a mistake, because this case tells us little about when economic pressure without decisive military force would compel a target state to make concessions.12

**Why Expropriations Do Not Count**

Four of the 35 cases in dispute between myself and HSE are expropriation disputes, cases in which economic pressure is used to compel a country to pay financial compensation for nationalizing the property of foreign-owned companies. Both Elliott's response and the original HSE study say that ordinary trade disputes should be excluded from the sanctions universe because these involve the use of economic pressure for economic, as opposed to political, goals. I agree, but I also exclude expropriation cases because they involve the use of economic pressure for economic goals, and so qualify as ordinary commercial disputes, not instances of economic sanctions. Elliott argues that expropriation cases should not be lumped together with other commercial disputes because, unlike trade disputes, expropriation disputes are politically charged: "Agreement by the target country to provide compensation is . . . an indication that it is willing to play by the basic rules of the international game" (p. 53).

There are four reasons to reject Elliott's position on expropriations. First, all international trade disputes—whether they involve tariffs, quotas, exchange rates, regulation of foreign investment, environmental standards, compensation for expropriations, or other issues—are politically charged. This is because concessions on these issues necessarily involve infringements on those states' sovereignty, always involve distributional issues within the domestic economies of the negotiating states, and often involve distributional issues across states. Accordingly, trade disputes often excite intense political passions, including strong feelings of nationalism.13 If we were to include in the sanctions universe all international economic disputes that excite political interest in any of the negotiating states, the universe would become uncountably large.

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12. Ibid., pp. 111–112.
Second, in practice HSE’s original study generally follows the same logic on expropriation cases that I do. They omit most expropriation disputes, including only a minority of them. One survey of expropriation, which covers fewer years than HSE and only disputes involving the United States, counts 20 additional cases beyond those included in the HSE database in which the United States applied economic pressure to induce the expropriating state to pay compensation. The handful of expropriation cases that are included in HSE are apparently exceptions whose justification is not obvious.

Third, while HSE and I agree that the use of economic pressure for commercial disputes should be ruled out of the sanctions universe, once the use of economic pressure for economic goals is ruled out of the sanctions universe it is important to apply this rule rigorously. There is little reason to believe that cases in which economic pressure can obtain financial compensation for seized property tell us much about when economic sanctions can achieve non-economic goals. In effect, this means leaving aside cases in which sanctioning states define the goals of sanctions strictly in economic or financial terms. I agree with Elliott to the extent that cases in which compensation for expropriation was a lesser goal in addition to a political objective should be counted as part of the sanctions universe. For example, I have no objection to HSE’s inclusion of U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba since 1960.

Finally, the stakes in this particular disagreement are small. In her response, Elliott reduces the cases in dispute from 4 to 3 by agreeing to my coding of France-Tunisia 1964. Thus, even if we accept HSE’s original coding of the remaining 3 cases, which I do not, this would mean sanctions were effective in 8, instead of 5, of 115 cases—a difference too small to affect my conclusion.

Disputed Cases: History 7, Sanctions 0

In an appendix to her response, Elliott challenges my interpretation of 7 cases. However, given that I challenge 35 of HSE’s 40 claimed successes, disputing the facts on a small number of cases is insufficient to justify even moderate optimism on sanctions. Unless Elliott (or others) can show that the vast major-

ity of the 35 cases I challenge are in fact legitimate successes of economic sanctions, then my conclusion that there is little evidence that sanctions can achieve ambitious goals still stands.

Moreover, only 2 of Elliott’s 7 cases warrant further discussion here. Two of the 7 (U.S.-Netherlands 1948 and South Africa-Lesotho 1982) are cases that I coded as indeterminate because they were overdetermined. In both cases, economic sanctions and military force were used, and there is good reason to believe that either tool alone would have been sufficient to cause each outcome. Three cases are straightforward failures of economic sanctions. Elliott’s claims notwithstanding, in the U.S.-Taiwan 1977 and U.S.-Iran 1979 cases, the target state made no meaningful concessions. In the League of Nations-Yugoslavia 1921 case, the outcome was determined by the threat of military intervention. Economic sanctions had hardly any effect on the outcome of these 5 cases. I encourage readers to compare my accounts of these cases with Elliott’s, because I am confident you will agree with my interpretation of the facts.

In the U.S.-U.K./France 1956 case (the Suez crisis), Elliott’s interpretation is consistent with much of the 1980s secondary literature, but these accounts have been superseded by primary evidence that has become available since then. Britain’s and France’s decisions on November 6 to abandon their invasion of the Canal Zone was determined by the reluctance of the United States to support them in the face of the Soviet nuclear threat, not by any form of American economic pressure. Contrary to Elliott, American, British, and French leaders all took the Soviet threat extremely seriously. Elliott attributes the British and French decisions to supposed American instigation of a run on the pound in the first few days of November. However, although heavy selling

15. Pape, “Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work.” pp. 133–135. Thus, while only 5 of 115 cases in the HSE database are clear successes that support their claim that economic sanctions could be effective in some circumstances, if we also count these indeterminate cases, then the maximum number that could be counted as supporting HSE’s sanctions optimism would rise to 7 cases of 115. (There is a third indeterminate case, Canada-EC/Japan 1977, but in that case the uncertainty is over whether the target states made meaningful concessions.)


17. As British Prime Minister Anthony Eden explained to U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower: “If the Soviets intend to seize this opportunity of intervening by giving substantial support to [Canal State] Nasser, they may create a situation which could lead to major war. Hitherto I have not thought it likely that Russia would take this dangerous step. I have believed that it was anxious to avoid world war and that, although it [Russia] would make all possible minor trouble it would stick to the policy of making mischief by all means short of war. But the new men in the Kremlin may be less coldly calculating than their predecessors and, if so, they may be led into taking a step which may precipitate a really grave situation.” Prime Minister Personal Telegram, Eden to Eisenhower, November 7, 1956, PREM 11/1177, Public Records Office, London.
of the pound did occur in world currency markets, there is no evidence that the U.S. government participated in or encouraged this and some evidence against it. It is more likely that the pressure on the pound, which continued unabated from July through December, resulted from market forces caused by Britain’s balance of payments problems and by the evident risks of Britain’s Suez adventure. Because of its inherent interest and importance, this case receives one of the most extended treatments in my original article, which I encourage readers to compare to Elliott’s.

Finally, one case (the League of Nations-Greece 1925) requires more detailed discussion because Elliott claims that I have ignored a critical piece of evidence. This case concerns a League demand that Greece withdraw some 1,000 troops that had entered Bulgarian territory. Elliott argues that this case should be considered a success for economic sanctions on the basis of a phrase referring to the possible consequences of an economic blockade in a telegram from Alexandros Carapanos, Greece’s ambassador in Paris, which she claims is “the only evidence we have” of the reasons for Greece’s decision to withdraw its troops.18

In fact, the record of this case is fairly rich, and it shows that economic sanctions could not have affected Greek behavior because they were not used, not threatened, and indeed not even seriously contemplated by the League. On October 19, 1925, following an exchange of gunfire between sentries on opposite sides of the border between Bulgaria and Greece, Bulgarian troops occupied a Greek border post. Under the misapprehension that a large number of Bulgarian forces had entered Greek territory, Greece responded on October 22 by dispatching approximately 1,000 troops into Bulgarian territory to encircle the Bulgarian troops in Greece. The Greeks quickly discovered their error, and on October 24 halted their own forces 8 kilometers into Bulgarian territory.19

On October 23, Aristide Briand, France’s prime minister and acting president of the League of Nations, under his own misapprehension that Greece was the only offender, telegraphed Athens demanding that Greece withdraw and threatening “grave consequences” if it did not. He also arranged for a meeting

of the League on October 26 to discuss the case.20 On October 24, the Greek government in effect rejected Briand’s demand, responding that it would withdraw its own troops if and when the Bulgarians returned the seized border post.21 By the time the League convened on October 26, Briand had learned that Bulgarian troops had in fact seized the Greek border post. Accordingly, he persuaded the League Council to adopt a more evenhanded position, demanding that both sides withdraw behind their respective frontiers within sixty hours. At no point did Briand or the League threaten either side with any specific sanction.

On the morning of October 26, before the League met, Romania offered to mediate the dispute on the basis of an agreement where the Greeks would reoccupy their lost border post on October 27, and then withdraw all Greek forces from Bulgaria. Greece immediately accepted this offer, and Bulgaria quickly followed suit. Although both sides had accepted the Romanians’ deal before the League meeting opened, Briand first learned of it during the meeting. He responded by sending a telegram to Athens and Sophia expressing his approval. The border post was returned to Greece at 4:00 P.M. on October 27, and Greek forces began withdrawing from Bulgaria at noon the next day, completing their withdrawal by midnight. Thus the Greeks obtained the same terms they had originally demanded.22

The only consideration of any concrete action by the League took place in a private meeting on October 27 involving Briand, Italy’s representative to the League, Vittorio Scialoja, and Britain’s foreign secretary, Sir Austin Chamberlain. They discussed possible League responses in the event Greece did not withdraw its troops from Bulgaria. They considered two options—economic blockade and direct military action—and explicitly rejected blockade in favor of a naval demonstration directed at Athens’s adjacent seaport city of Piraeus. They believed that a blockade would be largely ineffective against Greece with its long coastline and many islands.23

20. Briand actually sent identical telegrams to Athens and Sophia, but because we know from League records that at this point he thought that only Greek troops had crossed the border, his threat had to be aimed at Greece only. “Minutes of Meeting, October 26, 1925,” League of Nations Official Journal (November 1925), pp. 1696–1699.
21. Briand and the League took no action on October 24 or 25, because it was the weekend.
23. Briand also asked League lawyers for opinions on whether military measures, such as a naval bombardment or troop landings, were within the League’s authority. Barros, The League of Nations and the Great Powers, pp. 79, 126–137.
This case admits of two possible interpretations. The first possibility is that diplomacy, rather than economic or military pressure, was the key instrument in this case. Both Greece and Bulgaria recognized that they had an interest in quickly returning to the status quo ante and did so as soon as the Romanian intervention offered a face-saving and neutrally monitored way to do so. Given that neither side had expansionist aims and that both accepted the help of an honest broker as soon as one appeared, there is little reason to believe that any form of pressure by the League was significant to the outcome. Second, if League pressure was significant to the outcome, credit would have to be given to military rather than economic pressure, given that the League decided against the latter in favor of the former. The one interpretation of this case that is not possible is economic coercion.

The Illiberalism of Economic Sanctions

At the end of the day, there is little empirical evidence that sanctions can achieve ambitious foreign policy goals. What does this imply for policy? Although sanctions are sometimes credited as a low-cost and relatively humane alternative to other coercive instruments such as military force, these are not sufficient reasons for employing sanctions in situations where we do not have high confidence that they will work. First, economic sanctions often inflict significant human costs on the populations of target states, including on innocent civilians who have little influence on their government's behavior. Recent evidence suggests that the international economic sanctions on Iraq since 1990 have led to the deaths of as many as 567,000 Iraqi children, compared with the reported 40,000 military and 5,000 civilian deaths during the 1991 Gulf War.

Second, using economic sanctions that are likely to fail may actually increase costs and risks for coercers by increasing the likelihood that the sanctioning state will ultimately resort to force. Policymakers may escalate in order to

24. Starting on October 24, the Greeks received reports of intervention by possible armed bands from Yugoslavia, and on October 26 Turkey offered to "mediate" an action that the Greeks perceived as hostile. If either of these events influenced Greek decision making, then they would also support interpreting this case as an instance of military coercion, albeit not by the League.

25. The telegram by Carapanos on which Elliott relies for her interpretation could not have affected Athens's decisions because it was not sent until the afternoon of October 28, by which time the Greek withdrawal was already well under way, according to a League representative on the scene. "Action of the League in the Greco-Bulgarian Affair," Contemporary Review (January–June 1926), p. 41. Barros, on whom Elliott relies for her interpretation, missed a key part of the story, failing to credit the Romanian intervention even though Briand, the League, and contemporary journalists did.
rescue their own prestige or their state’s international reputation, and rhetoric used to justify sanctions can demonize the target regime, making publics willing to resort to more extreme measures if sanctions fail. Sanctions may even be the “American way of war,” which democratic leaders may sometimes adopt in order to “give peace a chance” and thus disarm criticism of the use of force later. Thus, far from avoiding unnecessary wars, overreliance on sanctions may contribute to them.

The weak power of economic sanctions does not mean, however, that we should just employ force instead—this is expensive and destructive and often does not work.26 Disasters such as Vietnam and Somalia demonstrate that advocates of military coercion can sometimes be just as overoptimistic as advocates of economic sanctions. Understanding the limits of both sanctions and force as coercive instruments may help policymakers identify situations in which diplomacy may be a better approach than coercion, or in which the United States may have to accept that it simply cannot impose its will at an acceptable cost.

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