

# MERIA

## U.S. Foreign Policy and Rogue States+

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*At first, the concept of "rogue state" in U.S. foreign policy might seem a recent and rather arbitrary phrase. In fact, however, it proves to be a remarkably useful concept in understanding American foreign policy, especially with reference to the Middle East. This category helps define U.S. interactions with such states as Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. But it also may reveal something about the nature of those countries' policies and international behavior.*

The issue of "rogue states" for American foreign policy is a relatively recent development involving a handful of mostly Middle Eastern states, especially Iran and Iraq. On examination, however, this concept provides a better understanding of U.S. policymaking and diplomatic history.

In a sense, the labeling of a country as a rogue state is a certificate of political insanity, in terms of the rules of realpolitik and maintaining international order. Countries can be in conflict or even in a state of war, yet still observe certain limits and patterns of behavior. A rogue state is one that puts a high priority on subverting other states and sponsoring non-conventional types of violence against them. It does not react predictably to deterrence or other tools of diplomacy and statecraft. In short, such a state requires special treatment and high levels of international pressure in order to prevent it from wrecking public order, setting off wars, and subverting whole areas of the world. Perhaps one might see this framework as an attempt to establish an international equivalent of incarceration or commitment to a mental institution, until there is sufficient recovery to permit reentry into the international system. Hebrew University professor Yehezkel Dror even coined the phrase "crazy states" to describe such countries.

This concept of a rogue state also has a specific link to America's own self-image

and its relationship with the world. The United States is a rare great power in two respects: it is far more reluctant than other such states to undertake international engagements, and its goals are determined relatively less by realpolitik. This situation is based on both geography and on political philosophy.

Protected by both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, with no other strong powers in the Western Hemisphere, American political culture was largely shaped in the absence of the kinds of external threats which determined European diplomatic concepts. Foreign entanglements-which America's first president, George Washington, explicitly warned about in his inaugural address more than 200 years ago-were seen as optional.

While material interests-resources, strategic locations, etc.-did later play a role in setting the American foreign policy agenda, they always seemed secondary, both in the policymakers' worldview and certainly in the public's opinion. Even in the twentieth century, the possibility of a direct attack on U.S. territory was unlikely; the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 was the exception which proved the rule, leading immediately to war. Why would the United States wish to send forces thousands of miles away when it did not absolutely have to do so?

The other aspect of the American approach reinforced these geographical tendencies and answered the question of what would push the United States into high-risk voluntary military actions. America was the first modern democratic state, produced by an anti-colonial revolution. In a sense, America was to the nineteenth century what Russia was to the twentieth: a regime representing a new system antithetical to existing ones. Yet the United States did not seek world conquest nor systematically try to spread its system or sphere of influence.

The United States sought to project its ideology-anti-monarchical, pro-democratic, and pro-human rights-by example rather than power. In short, America could have been a rogue state itself but was determined to prove to the European nations that its standpoint did not prevent its playing a normal role in the world community. Comparing the United States' policies to the aggressive tactics of its European contemporary, Napoleonic France, illustrates this point clearly.

The United States needed a motive to become involved in international affairs, and issues surrounding democracy, human rights, maintaining stability, and opposing aggression were the most likely candidates. A country must behave particularly badly or dangerously in order to trigger a U.S. military reaction. If a state behaved as a rogue power-breaking U.S. rules of conduct or attacking neighbors aggressively-it furnished both the rationale and necessity for U.S. response.

It is virtually inevitable that a state considered a rogue will be a repressive dictatorship, but that form of government alone is not sufficient for such a classification. More important, the United States must see the regime as outwardly aggressive. Similarly, a rogue state is not just a country whose interests clash with the

United States, but one that also jeopardizes the international order. Such a state threatens to draw the United States into conflict even if America seeks to avoid it.

Since a rogue regime does not respond to normal diplomatic measures-for example, a rogue will misinterpret signals or refuse to stop systematic subversion and terrorism-confidence- building or conflict-avoidance methods do not work. Other, harsher measures and attitudes are needed. These mechanisms do not necessarily involve war, unless the rogue state takes a specific step which makes such an outcome unavoidable. The United States prefers tactics such as non-recognition, embargoes, isolation, and international condemnation.

Rogue states have often been produced by revolutions. A new regime and ideology comes to power which wants to change the entire surrounding region, or even the whole world. This was true at various times for the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, and Iran. Generally speaking, revolutionary regimes have become more moderate over time, given their need to survive and the normal process of institutionalization and bureaucratization. The latest candidate for rogue status was the Yugoslav government, a product of the upheavals following the death of long-time ruler Joseph Tito and the territorial breakup of old Yugoslavia.

Often, the personality of an individual dictator can come into play, since the leader of such a state needs to have an overweening ambition combined with a low level of caution. Thus, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong, for example, had a global ambition that their successors did not necessarily share. How Iraq will fare after Saddam Hussein, Libya after Muammar Qadhafi or Cuba after Fidel Castro is another matter. The next leader might be willing to trade various concessions in exchange for being demoted from its rogue status. There had been hope that Iran would follow the pattern of moderation as the Islamic regime grew older and the militancy of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became a more distant memory. So far, this expectation has been disappointed.

When a regime has been ready to change direction, however, the United States

has responded eagerly. Indeed, American policymakers have a sense of relief in avoiding potential confrontation, controversial policy, and costly economic sanctions. For example, in 1999, the United States made a deal with Libya in which that country's rogue status was reduced—probably temporarily—in exchange for the extradition of two

Libyan intelligence officers accused of ordering the bombing of a U.S. airliner with heavy loss of life a decade earlier. The United States agreed not to probe too deeply into wider Libyan government involvement in that terrorist act.

These debates over rogue states are an important part of internal American foreign policy discussions. At present, there are those who argue that Iran should be treated as a normal state, while others contend that the People's Republic of China should be considered more of a rogue because of its human rights policies and international ambitions. Past arguments over how to deal with—or even whether to deal with—the Soviet Union and China were at the center of the discussion over Cold War strategy.

Presidential decisions to change American policy on such matters—by Franklin Roosevelt on the USSR, and by Richard Nixon on China—became major turning points in U.S. foreign policy. Such arguments can also be highly partisan. In the 1950s, Republican party members argued that the USSR was essentially a rogue state, though they did not pursue the logic of this position when they gained power. Often, though, the list of rogue states can be bipartisan, based on a fundamental consensus.

Sometimes the disagreement can be between branches or agencies of the U.S. government. The White House could be quicker than Congress to seek the lifting of rogue status, as it is more sensitive to the economic demands of companies seeking investments or trade, to the urging of less enthusiastic allies, or to other realpolitik considerations. In the case of Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua in the 1980s, however,

Congress tried to restrain the administration of President Ronald Reagan, which viewed Nicaragua as a rogue state dedicated to spreading revolt throughout Central America.

In recent years, the concept of rogue states has become a central and explicit part of U.S. policy regarding the Persian Gulf region. The presence of two rogue states in the Gulf—Iraq and Iran—each of which had threatened regional stability, meant that a major part of U.S. policy toward the region was centered on this issue. Since neither Iraq nor Iran could be trusted, the United States needed to contain them both simultaneously.

Why did the Middle East become such an important area of rogue states? In part, this view is misleading since there have been more instances of such policy behavior in other parts of the world than has been generally recognized. Still, the Middle East has also been a major center of non-Communist radical doctrines, an area where states have felt more free to intervene in each other's affairs and where the level of legitimacy for the regional order and of individual states has been less established.

Finally, it is extremely important to correct a misunderstanding about the goals of U.S. policy concerning rogue states. It is true that the highest objective has been to remove the regime from power or to force it to change policy. Still, a secondary purpose has been to prevent the state from implementing its extremist policies, denying it the resources to do so, weakening it economically, ensuring that it did not find allies, and so on. In short, the policy cannot be said to fail merely because the rogue government is still in office and preserves the same rhetoric. U.S. policy is a success if the rogue regime is unable to act effectively in fulfilling its ambitions.

#### A ROGUES GALLERY

The USSR (1917-1933, approximately 1947-1955)

The creation of the Soviet Union in November 1917 produced a new type of

state with a unique ideology. Marxism-Leninism not only called for an internal revolution in Russia, it was also a doctrine of global upheaval. It openly called for the overthrow of all existing governments and was ready to use its resources to implement that plan, both through direct subversion and through the support of local revolutionary parties.

For the first 15 years of its existence, the United States refused to recognize the Soviet Union, viewing it as an outlaw state. In 1933, Roosevelt concluded that the Soviet threat was exaggerated, granted recognition, and established normal relations. He had concluded that either the USSR was no longer seeking world conquest or that at least such a vision was irrelevant to the actual conduct of affairs.

Beginning around 1947 and extending into the mid-1950s, however, the view that the USSR was a rogue state reappeared. This was largely due to Soviet actions initiating the Cold War, the apparent success of Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe and China, and also to the internal American debate over the threat of Communism. As normal diplomacy began to reestablish itself in the mid-1950s-regulating and limiting though not reducing the intensity of Cold War conflict-this view faded. Part of the internal American debate was whether the USSR was a rogue state or not. For example, George Kennan's famous diplomatic telegrams and Foreign Affairs article argued that the USSR was acting in the context of traditional Russian foreign policy goals. An extended period of containment, he argued, would produce a change in Soviet behavior.

#### Nazi Germany (1939-1945)

Much of the debate over how to deal with Adolf Hitler's regime revolved implicitly around the question of whether Germany was a rogue state or whether it had certain, conceivably legitimate, or at least relatively limited, demands. Those favoring appeasement claimed that their approach would work because by fulfilling Hitler's

requirements, Germany could be turned into a normal state in the international system. This effort failed precisely because Nazi Germany was a rogue state. Hitler's goal was to conquer Europe, if not the world, without regard to practical considerations that Germany could not win. An extremist ideology fueled barbaric behavior and unbridled adventurism and aggression. Thus, U.S. policymakers concluded that only total war and unconditional surrender-that is, the total destruction of the regime-could resolve the problem.

#### The People's Republic of China (1950-1972)

In part, communist China was perceived as a rogue state as an extension of Stalin's USSR. But the extremist tone which often emanated from China, and Beijing's role in the Korean war, encouraged that perception, as did Republican attacks on President Harry Truman for "losing China". Chinese rhetoric and expressed willingness to help revolutionary movements throughout the world made it an apparently archetypal rogue state. Even so, China did not follow its neighbor's path. The Sino-Soviet split did not directly moderate China's rogue-type qualities (indeed, it partly resulted from them) but did offer the United States the opportunity and incentive to develop detente. For its own reasons, China was also interested in revising its own policies. The secret initiatives of Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, thus erased China's rogue status overnight. China did increasingly act as a normal international player, especially after Mao Zedong died and more moderate leaders succeeded him.

#### Cuba (1959- )

Many of the points made above about China also apply to Cuba. China was seen as the rogue threatening Asia, while Cuba seemed to fill that role in relation to Latin America. Yet the assignment of rogue status to Cuba seemed more subjective than its application to the USSR or China. After all, Cuban support for Latin American

revolutionary groups ceased to be important by the late 1960s. Perhaps the shock of radicalization for a country considered to be so much in the U.S. sphere of influence, as well as the significant Cuban ethnic lobby in the United States, has played a role in sustaining the rogue designation far longer than might otherwise have been the case. Castro's continued power is also a factor here, since he remains a symbol of revolutionary commitment long after the substance of his revolution has very much eroded.

Iran (1979- )

Iran could be considered an almost self-declared rogue state. It is important to note that shortly after the Iranian revolution, the United States declared its willingness to accept the outcome and establish normal relations with an Islamic Iran. After all, it was Iran which branded the United States as "the great Satan" and not vice-versa. Iran's government backed the seizure of the American embassy and the holding of the officials there as hostages, a preeminent proof of its rogue nature. How could one negotiate diplomatically with a regime that kidnapped one's diplomats? Iran also supported foreign revolutionary groups, tried to subvert neighbors (albeit more by rhetoric than by force of arms), and sponsored terrorism as well. The United States had in the 1990s demanded that Iran cease its drive for weapons of mass destruction, sponsorship of terrorism, and efforts to wreck the regional Arab-Israeli peace process. By 1998 there were hopes in Washington that Iranian policy would mellow following the election of President Muhammad Khatami. Attempts at detente, however, did not progress since the radical faction in the Iranian leadership refused to change policy and worked to block any improved bilateral relations.

Iraq (1990- )

Iraq is a good example of a country which was long ruled by a series of radical,

anti-American, and aggressive dictatorships (from 1958 on) yet was never considered a rogue state by U.S. policy. Indeed, it was Iraq which broke relations with the United States (in 1967) and not the other way around. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, Iraq came to be seen as something of an asset. Baghdad was blocking the spread of Iranian influence in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the United States became steadily more friendly to Iraq during this period. Even after the war's end and at a time when Iraq was constantly attacking the United States and voicing regional ambitions, U.S. policy did not even oppose or criticize Iraqi behavior.

Only with Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, refusal to withdraw, and waging of war on a U.S.-led coalition, did the United States declare Iraq a rogue state. This position was extended and reinforced by Iraq's refusal to live up to its commitments under the agreements ending the fighting. Moreover, U.S. efforts were underpinned by UN resolutions. Saddam Hussein's refusals to compromise (even when compromise seemed to be to his own disadvantage) convinced American policymakers that Iraq was a "crazy state". Further, a new factor entered the picture with Iraq's efforts to obtain nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction. Such powerful equipment in the hands of a rogue state-which also showed a readiness to use such weapons-was an especially frightening scenario. Consequently, the United States declared its reference to maintain sanctions until Saddam Hussein's regime fell. Other measures used against Iraq included sporadic bombings and the maintenance of an autonomous Kurdish area in the north.

Libya (approximately 1973-?)

America's view of Libya as a rogue state was closely tied to the image of its leader, Muammar Qadhafi. By his erratic and adventurous actions, Qadhafi seemed the very embodiment of a rogue regime leader. He sponsored terrorism, subverted

neighbors, and made the wildest statements and accusations. A high point in U.S. efforts against Libya was the 1985 bombing of Libya's. Qadhafi's inconsistent behavior made him moderate his activities at times, and then return to his radical mode. The negotiation of a settlement to the UN-mandated sanctions stemming from the Lockerbie bombing might ease U.S.-Libya relations for a while, but Qadhafi seems likely to return to his usual pattern before long.

#### North Korea (1950- )

North Korea remained the champion of longevity in terms of appearing as a rogue regime in American perceptions. Its bizarre internal dictatorship, invasion of South Korea in 1950, and direct involvement in terrorism guaranteed it a place on the roster of rogues. Only the regime's collapse seems likely to remove it from this fate.

It is also useful to evaluate two states that never, or only briefly, were viewed as rogues by the United States:

#### Japan

Japan was never quite considered a rogue because it acted out of comprehensible and "normal" imperial motives. Indeed, the fact that Japan was not considered a rogue might have been one reason why the United States was not prepared for its 1941 sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The United States thought it could affect Japan's behavior by normal diplomacy and was still engaged in serious negotiations at the moment the bombs started hitting American battleships.

#### Syria

Syria was never quite considered a rogue, despite its sponsorship of terrorism and domination over Lebanon, because it generally lived up to its international agreements. Again, the regime's behavior was not palatable but seemed within the

realm of normal practices. The fact that Syria might seem to make itself useful (in joining the anti-Iraq coalition in 1991) or cooperative (by joining the post-1991 negotiations with Israel) also protected it from this fate.

There are also some clear candidates for rogue status in the near future. (Some might argue that the following states have already attained this status.) Here one thinks of the Taleban-ruled Afghanistan (bizarre internal practices, harboring of international terrorists who attacked Americans), the Serbian nationalist Yugoslavian regime (subversion in Bosnia; human rights violations in Kosovo), and Islamic Sudan (involvement in international terrorism, hosting of many terrorist training bases). Clearly, the importance of the rogue state factor in U.S. foreign policy is far from an end, and this framework is a far more important element than has been recognized in shaping the debates, goals, and tools of U.S. foreign policy.

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