

# THE BUSH DOCTRINE AND “ROGUE” STATES



**T**HE BUSH ADMINISTRATION POLICY AIMS TO TAME “ROGUE” STATES OR, FAILING THAT, DESTROY THEM. WILL IT BE JUDGED A SUCCESS?

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BY CHRISTOPHER PREBLE

The lovable rogue is one of the most enduring archetypes of literature. From Robin Hood to Rhett Butler, some renegades who operate outside the bounds of acceptable behavior are nevertheless embraced as heroes because their intentions are good. In other words, they break the rules for good reasons and, in the process, win both admiration and affection.

Nation-states saddled with the “rogue” moniker, however, are neither admired nor loved. And, since the 9/11 attacks, President Bush has communicated a clear message that rogue regimes are marked for destruction — one way

or another. It is still too soon to say for sure whether the Bush Doctrine will ultimately be judged a success or failure. Indeed, the interpretation of history being what it is, there are sure to be differences of opinion.

But while the president maintains, on the basis of largely circumstantial evidence, that the war waged to remove Saddam Hussein from power was instrumental in convincing Libya's Muammar Qadhafi to abandon his nuclear schemes, he cannot account for why the leaders in two other rogue states — Iran and North Korea — have failed to respond as the Bush Doctrine suggests that they would: by capitulating. And that raises questions about the efficacy of the Bush Doctrine toward all rogue states.

### **Knowing the Rules**

The problem of rogues in the international system is not new, even if the terms “rogue state,” “pariah state” and “outlaw state” might be.

From the assassins and bandits that patrolled the outer reaches of the Roman Empire, to the Barbary pirates of the early 19th century, there have always been outlaws. They thrived through much of human history not so much because they were strong, but rather because the institutions which existed to enforce certain norms were relatively weak.

Even today, however, when states are strong relative to their predecessors, and acceptable norms of behavior are generally embraced around the world, the non-state outlaw is still with us. When these men and women combine their efforts they can be very dangerous. International criminal enterprises exist, and not just in movies. The sky-high profits created by the criminalization of certain narcotics feed internal corruption from Colombia and Mexico to Afghanistan and Russia. Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations demonstrate that the emergence of the nation-state as the dominant form

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of political organization around the world does not ensure security, even in places where the state is very strong: the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and even the United States, just to name a few.

Meanwhile, even as more and more states have come together in the interest of stopping international terrorism, there remain rogue states that flout established rules and norms. The tra-

ditional definition of a rogue state pertains to violations of state sovereignty. Article 2 of the United Nations charter stipulates that all member nations shall “refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.” Iraq clearly acted as a rogue state when it invaded Kuwait in 1990, and the international community responded with near-unanimity; Saddam was expelled from Kuwait by a group of nations acting with the official sanction of the United Nations.

In recent years, however, the definition has become increasingly muddled. It now takes account not simply of how states interact with other states, but also of how particular regimes treat their own people. As a result, the number of potential rogue states has expanded dramatically. Article 2 has been largely superceded by a particular interpretation of international relations based on a nebulous “responsibility to protect.” Indeed, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan recently reaffirmed the world body’s right to circumvent state sovereignty in certain circumstances. “Governments must assume their responsibility to protect their citizens,” Annan explained at a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in December 2004. “Where they fail to do so, the Security Council must assume its responsibility to protect.”

The Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change expanded on this theme in its 2004 report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. The Security Council, the panelists explained, could authorize “military intervention as a last resort, in the event of genocide and other large-scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of humani-

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tarian law which sovereign Governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent.”

President Bush has elevated a broader definition of respect for human rights; from his perspective, a state can be classified as a rogue if it denies freedom to some of its citizens. But he has arrived at this determination not out of fealty to the United Nations, nor to the niceties of international law. Rather, the president's reasoning harkens back to the words of another president locked in a brutal struggle for justice, and who, like George Bush, perceived a divine mission in much that he did. “The rulers of outlaw regimes can know,” the president declared during his second inaugural address, “that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: ‘Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.’”

### The Bush Doctrine

There is a fundamental contradiction within interna-

tional law between the inviolability of sovereignty and the conditionality of that same sovereignty. And there is also deep disagreement as to who gets to decide when and how the responsibility to protect trumps the established rules of the game.

President Bush views the rogue state as the chief threat to global order, and his foreign policies aim either to alter the behavior of rogue states, or, failing that, to eliminate those regimes that refuse to play by the rules. As Robert W. Merry explains in his recent book, *Sands of Empire: Missionary Zeal, American Foreign Policy, and the Hazards of Global Ambition* (Simon & Schuster, 2005), the Bush Doctrine advances three core propositions — pre-emption, democratization and dominance.

Pre-emption typically means attacking an enemy before he attacks you. But pre-emption as practiced by the Bush administration is more accurately understood as “preventive war.” Although pre-emption of an imminent attack has long been accepted under international law, preventive war — whereby a government chooses to take

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action before a threat materializes — has typically been shunned.

The president remains unapologetic for challenging this understanding. “If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long,” he told West Point cadets in June 2002. “We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act.”

Preventive war as advocated by the Bush administration is intertwined with the second premise of the Bush doctrine: namely, that of spreading democratic values. The decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power went beyond simply eliminating a nuisance or a potential threat. It was intended to dislodge a tyrant and establish a democratic government in Iraq.

As such, the Bush Doctrine goes beyond the narrow focus of discouraging rogue states from attacking the United States. Equally important is the demonstration effect that is expected to carry over to other rogue regimes: “Do you want this to happen to you?” With its coercive posture, U.S. policy aims to convince despotic regimes to forgo their autocratic ways, or else suffer the fate of Saddam Hussein. This ostensibly applies both to states that do directly threaten the United States, and those that don’t.

But there’s a problem: it doesn’t work. The Bush Doctrine fails chiefly because the third element — the assumption of unchallenged American dominance — cannot be sustained indefinitely. And our adversaries know that.

### **Dominant, Not Omnipotent**

The U.S. has sufficient power to engage in a war to change a regime such as Saddam Hussein’s, and can do so in the face of opposition from other powerful states, including China, Russia, France and Germany.

As for our power to deter other nation-states from attacking us, our nuclear arsenal alone, irrespective of our political and economic power, is sufficient to devastate entire nations if not the globe. This power has been instrumental in safeguarding U.S. security, particularly since the advent of long-range weapons. A number of countries have the capability to attack the United States, but all have been deterred from doing so.

The odd thing is that, despite all this power,

Americans feel profoundly insecure. And in one respect, at least, such feelings are justified. Al-Qaida obviously disdains international law, but is equally undeterred by our retaliatory power. Meanwhile, recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan are demonstrating each day that America, while powerful, is hardly omnipotent.

Frustrated by the fact that they would feel so insecure after having spent hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars per year on defense, Americans cry out for a national security strategy that does what it is advertised to do: advance national security.

Knowing that power is limited, and that resources must be deployed in a careful and judicious manner, scholars schooled in the realist tradition look to other major powers to do some of the heavy lifting in the international system. Driven largely by self-interest, these regional powers may take action against rogue states that threaten them. They might also intervene in the internal affairs of neighboring states if humanitarian crises give rise to dangerous disorder.

Some people, reluctant to sign on to the “old” realist theory of balance of power, yet convinced of our nation’s limited means, favor burden-sharing through the United Nations, or a similar institution empowered to enforce international norms of behavior.

The shortcomings of this approach were first revealed during the late 1990s. While professing great sympathy for the goals of the United Nations as an institution, the Clinton administration showed its impatience with the United Nations when it circumvented the world body twice in a matter of six months, first to launch air strikes against Iraq (Desert Fox) in late 1998 and then to launch a war against Serbia in the spring of 1999.

The most committed multilateralists must concede that, in the end, national power is what prevails. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, George H. W. Bush’s national security adviser, admits as much. During remarks delivered to the Council on Foreign Relations late last year Scowcroft, a member of a high-level panel appointed by the secretary general to study U.N. reform, explained: “In the end ... if one of the permanent members of the Security Council or a major state considers something to be in its vital interest, the U.N. is not going to be able to do anything about it.” That, he went on to say, “is [the] imperfect nature of the body that we have.”

Imperfect and uncertain. It is hardly surprising that North Korea and Iran, both rogue states by the Bush

administration's definition, are not content to stake their security on the good word but limited power of the United Nations. As Ted Galen Carpenter and Charles V. Peña explain in the summer 2005 issue of *The National Interest*, North Korea and Iran's apparent nuclear ambitions can be seen as "a logical, perhaps even inevitable, response to the foreign policy the United States has pursued since the end of the Cold War." These rogue states have responded to the threat of preventive war by developing the one instrument which enables even the smallest and most impoverished of countries to face down the strongest and richest — a nuclear weapon. For while most Americans believe that U.S. actions are guided by the best of intentions, Carpenter and Peña point out, "other nations may not concede that the motives of an activist power are benign."

### **Knowing Our Limits**

Recognizing that America's limited capacity for shaping the world in our own image may give rise to a host of unintended consequences, policy-makers must prioritize based on our vital interests, carefully defined. In this context, some rogue states prove useful allies; others are troublesome nuisances that do not threaten the United States. Still others might offend modern sensibilities in terms of how they treat their own citizens, but may at the same time be powerful or important enough that their precipitous regime change is either not in America's interest or beyond our capacity (China, for example).

Ultimately, therefore, U.S. policy toward rogue states should resemble our policies toward ... well, states in general. Most of the time, we will maintain peaceful relations with most countries around the world; occasionally containment and isolation might be necessary; and in a few very rare cases, confrontation might be required. The rogue state of Afghanistan under the Taliban was actively and knowingly harboring individuals who had already committed, and were prepared to commit again, horrible crimes against American citizens. The United States, acting with allies both inside and outside of Afghanistan, removed

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the Taliban from power.

The particular policy options that we employ should be contingent upon states' actual behavior. The United States may cooperate with rogue states on some issues, even as we oppose them on other fronts. After all, a China that behaved like a rogue state by threatening to use "non-peaceful means" to prevent Taiwan from formally declaring its independence has proved to be a helpful

state with respect to pressuring North Korea to return to the six-party talks on their nuclear program. The willingness of policy-makers within the Bush administration to work with Beijing on that issue does not imply that they condone the Chinese regime's behavior on any other issue. And, lest we forget, at least two of the states that assisted the United States in its war to remove the rogue regime of the Taliban — Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — are governed by petty despots who do not derive their authority from anything approaching the Jeffersonian standard (i.e., the consent of the governed).

If it were true that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one," as President Bush declared in his second inaugural address, then there would be no hard choices in foreign policy. But the world doesn't work that way. Policy-making entails making choices, virtually all of them difficult. National interests and abstract "values" must be kept largely separate; otherwise, it becomes harder and harder to differentiate those actions that are necessary and warranted from those that are unnecessary and unwise.

A half-century ago, President Dwight Eisenhower had a vision of national security that was shaped by his perception of national interests — interests that were, in turn, shaped by his sense that American power was limited. These limitations necessarily forced policy-makers to pick and choose where and when to intervene, and in what fashion. This was crucially important during the Cold War, when miscalculation risked provoking a global thermonuclear war.

Neoconservatives enamored of America's unipolar moment in the aftermath of the Cold War believe that

the constraints are essentially gone. The end of the Cold War meant that the United States could aspire to global dominance — something it never sought to do during the Cold War — because no one could challenge her. Indeed, as William Kristol and Lawrence F. Kaplan argued in making the case for war with Iraq, to revert to a foreign policy guided by “the narrowest self-interest” — in other words, to adhere to any realistic conception of our country’s limitations — would spell disaster because “the United States remains the hinge of the international system. And when it sits idly by in the face of threats to that system, international order erodes.” By this formulation, the United States is responsible for dealing with all rogues, anywhere in the world, because global security is completely dependent upon U.S. action.

### **Domestic Constraints**

But American power is not unlimited. There are constraints on how and when this power is deployed, and the most important of these are domestic, not foreign. While some might scorn the American public’s reluctance to play the world’s policeman, these attitudes reflect an accurate assessment of the high costs and dubious benefits of military operations that are not directly tied to the protection of U.S. vital interests. Few politicians will be willing to buck the trend if support for a particular overseas mission wanes.

An even more tangible limitation is the U.S. military itself. While our troops are eminently capable of defeating any force foolish enough to engage them on the battlefield, they cannot be everywhere, and they cannot do everything. We should be extremely careful about deploying our forces abroad, and we should be particularly wary of attempting to sustain a long-term military presence in foreign lands. In the meantime, in the interest of freeing up crucial resources in the war on al-Qaida and other threatening extremist groups, policy-makers should revisit Cold War-era military deployments that were dedicated to fighting a foe that has long since disappeared, and that have little, if any,

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relevance to fighting radical Islamists.

Beyond the military, however, policy-makers must focus on applying all of the means at our disposal — diplomatic, cultural, economic — that enhance U.S. security. Fighting terrorists will only rarely require the deployment of massive numbers of troops, but it will require other strategies and tactics that are not appropriate for fighting state-based threats.

Deterrence still works against states, even rogue ones. It did against Saddam Hussein. He never attacked the United States directly because he knew that such actions would be suicidal. The burden of proof should be very high for those who argue that the leaders of Iran or North Korea cannot be deterred in the same way as Saddam Hussein.

This is why the war in Iraq, the first manifestation of the broader strategy of confronting rogue states, is so tragic and unnecessary. The Bush administration opted to take action against an evil and despicable person who had been, and could have continued to be, deterred from taking action against us. Now, the U.S. military presence in Iraq plays into the feelings of resentment, humiliation and anger that Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and other terrorists use to recruit new fighters for their global jihad. The broader strategy concurrently encourages and enables our diplomatic adversaries to arm against us so as to secure themselves against preventive American action.

As Carpenter and Peña observe: “Those who cheered U.S. military interventions, conservatives and liberals alike, need to ask themselves whether increasing the incentives for nuclear proliferation was a price worth paying — because greater proliferation is the price we are now paying.”

There is time to change course. U.S. policy-makers should avoid an open-ended strategy of confronting all rogue states, not because they are lovable, but rather because the most immediate threats to our security — those posed by non-state rogues — demand their full attention. ■