

Royal College of Defence Studies

Seaford House

London

2nd MA Essay

12.12.2007

Colonel (GS) Christian Bühlmann, RCDS #65

Swiss Armed Forces

Has the threat from 'Rogue states' been grossly exaggerated?

2476 words

Introduction

Has the threat from 'rogue states' been grossly exaggerated? Before this interrogation can be dealt with, there is a need to deconstruct it: Even though the term of rogue states is enclosed within quotation marks, suggesting a misnomer, the question assumes that (1) the concept relates to a valid analytical model, (2) 'rogue states' can be linked together around a common 'threat' and (3) this menace can be assessed. It finally ponders that (4) this evaluation might have been blatantly overstated. Yet, as I will demonstrate later, this concept is much more an American political and rhetorical tool than an academic category. Thus, answering the question may seem problematic as one must (1) assume the reality of the 'rogue states' paradigm, while it appears to be a political construct and (2), one has to consider that 'rogue states' present a similar class of danger, while, in fact, they emerge as inconsistently linked together. Yet, this theme is nevertheless relevant, as the notion of 'rogue states' has shaped the US foreign and defence policies since the end of the Cold war.¹

Aim and scope

In this essay, I aim to appraise the threat posed by 'rogue states' and show that the concept was developed in the US for domestic and international reasons, and that it contains a risk of the US overreacting.

This essay contains four parts: (1) An historical description, (2) a critical appraisal, (3) a synthesis, and (4) a conclusion. It will only discuss the US understanding of rogue state as part of its modern-day doctrine.

The history of the rogue states concept

What are rogue states? Dr Robert S. Litwak notes that, before 1980, the adjective 'rogue' was seldom used, and then mostly to describe governments with a record of internal repression.² Litwak traces the direct origin of the rogue state strategy to the State Department's "terrorist list" created in

¹ Michael Klare, "The Rise and Fall of the "Rogue Doctrine": The Pentagon's Quest for a Post-Cold War Military Strategy," *Middle East Report*, no. 208 1998, Autumn.

² Robert S. Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy : Containment after the Cold War* (Washington D.C: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), p. 49-50.

1979 to curb state-sponsored terrorism.³ According to Professor Michael Klare, the link between state-sponsored terrorism and WMD made its way in the US administration by the end of the 80's:⁴ At the end of 1989, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Collin Powell, concerned that the Congress might impose drastic cuts to the US armed forces, "sought to construct a new threat scenario to justify the preservation of America's superpower capabilities in a world devoid of a prime adversary" whereas "multiple regional threats would govern US military planning".⁵ The concept was published in August 1990 by President Bush, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, thus justifying the change in the perception of the menace.⁶ After President Bill Clinton took office in 1993, the strategy was further elaborated by Secretary of Defense Lee Aspin and Powell: Revisionist powers, seeking a regional supremacy and developing WMD, would challenge the world order. The US military should be able to defeat those threats through military power projection.⁷ The rogue doctrine gained mainstream status in 1994 when Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* where he described the threat of "backlash states"⁸ While its argument aimed at justifying a policy of "dual containment" with Iran and Iraq,⁹ it set the tone for further actions against proliferating rogues. However, in June 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced the replacement of this concept by the more neutral term of 'states of concern', allowing an easier diplomatic engagement of those countries.¹⁰ One and a half years later, in the aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush reintroduced a similar concept, the "axis of evil", linking Iraq, Iran, and North Korea by their common pursuit of WMD and support for terrorist groups.¹¹ The 2006 *National Security Strategy* re-enacted the rhetoric of 'rogue states' to describe regimes seeking to develop WMD and supporting terrorists.¹² In summary, 'rogue states' can be defined as states that (1) support terrorism and (2) seek to develop WMD, while (3) being unable to "engage constructively with the outside world".¹³

³ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴ M Klare, 'Beyond the Rogues: Military Doctrine in a World of Chaos', *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996), p. 55.

⁵ Klare, "Rise and Fall," p. 12-13.

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸ Anthony Lake, "Confronting Backlash States," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 1994, p. 45.

⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰ Petra Minnerop, "Rogue States - State Sponsors of Terrorism?," *German Law Journal* 3, no. 9 2002.

¹¹ White House, "President Delivers State of the Union Address," (Washington DC: 2002),

¹² White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington DC: , 2006), p. 12, 18, 19 - 21, 29.

¹³ Lake, "Confronting ", p. 46.

An appraisal of the rogue state paradigm

In order to analyse whether the paradigm is valid, I will evaluate its status, assess the coherence of the threat model and compare it with the risk analysis underscored in the European security strategy.

The analytical nature of the concept

Is the 'rogue state' paradigm a political or an analytic concept? The answer to that question allows assessing the objectivity of the concept. If it is an analytical model, then I expect that its goal is to help rationalize the reality through a simplification of the world's complexity based on logical deductions.¹⁴ To Litwak, who analyses the concept within the realist and liberal paradigms, it derives from realism. Proliferation and terrorism as an instrument of policy are primarily associated with the rogue states' external behaviour, rather than to their intrinsic nature.¹⁵ One would therefore expect the rogue states paradigm to provide objective criteria to support an analysis of states behaviour, based on cost/benefit calculations.¹⁶ Yet, as Professor Deon Geldenhuys demonstrates, the concept is "descriptive, rather than analytical", "carrying emotive and pejorative connotations".¹⁷ This is, Litwak relates, linked to the US political culture, which tends to consider world politics as "a struggle between good and evil".¹⁸ Thus, instead of being a strategic tool, the concept of rogue states appears to be more like a moral compass.

Furthermore, while rogue states are accused of "flout[ing] international norms" (for instance, the Non Proliferation Treaty), Litwak recalls that the "concept has no standing in international law", and is "analytically soft and highly subjective," missing "objective criteria rooted in international law".¹⁹ Hence, the rogue states paradigm is not an analytical framework.

Do 'rogue states' pose a convergent threat?

In this section, I will examine which states have been included in the list and examine, briefly, whether there is continuity and logic in their inclusion.

¹⁴ Wayne Parsons, *Public Policy : Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis*, Paperback edition 2001 ed., (Cheltenham: Elgar, 1995), p. 57-58..

¹⁵ Litwak, *Rogue States*, p. 49.

¹⁶ Robert O. Keohane, *International institutions and state power: essays in international relations theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 40..

¹⁷ D Geldenhuys, "Beyond the Rogue State Paradigm," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 9, no. 1 2002, p. 75.

¹⁸ Litwak, *Rogue States*, p. 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Interestingly, there has never been an official list of rogue states, despite this term being used quite frequently by high-level US government officials; furthermore, according to French researcher Jacques Beltran, the State Department's yearly list of "terrorist states" is not congruent with the unofficial lists of rogue states (Figure 1).²⁰

US-defined 'rogue states'	
1994	Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya ²¹
Late '90	North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Burma, China, Serbia, Sudan, Viet-Nam ²²
2002	North Korea, Iran, Iraq ("Axis of evil") ²³
2006	North Korea, Iran ²⁴

Figure 1 States (unofficially) classified as 'rogue states' by the US

There is clearly a coherent core group of states on the list, which can be linked to proliferation (North Korea, Iran and partially Iraq), but not always to terrorism (North Korea and Iraq). However, some countries, such as Syria, have never been listed as rogue, despite supporting terrorism and attempting to develop WMD.²⁵ Pakistan, who is a true nuclear proliferating state, was not considered a rogue state anymore after 9/11. Furthermore, the presence of Cuba on the list is conspicuous as there is little proof that it has ever attempted to create WMD or has supported terrorist groups.²⁶ Therefore, as Geldenhuys asserts, the paradigm is not coherent because of (1) "the political selectivity and glaring inconsistencies" of a strategy that demonizes Cuba while neglecting Syria on pragmatic grounds,²⁷ and (2) the fact that this strategy integrates "an artificial lumping of disparate states", leading to "political distortions",²⁸ while trying to define a common policy for all. There is therefore no real common threat emerging between the rogue states.

Rogue states and other threats models

Finally, I will examine whether the rogues' threat model describes valid security issues by comparing it with the risk assessment provided by the 2003 European security strategy document, A

²⁰ Jacques Beltran, 'Les Etats-Unis et le concept de "states of concern" : vers la fin du containment ?' *Annuaire français de relations internationales* (Bruxelles: Editions Bruylant, 2001), p. 626.

²¹ Lake, "Confronting ", p. 46.

²² Beltran, 'States of concern', p. 626.

²³ White House, "State of the Union 2002,"

²⁴ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, p. 12.

²⁵ Beltran, 'States of concern', p. 628.

²⁶ Ibid.,

²⁷ Geldenhuys, "Beyond the Rogue," p. 77.

²⁸ Litwak, *Rogue States*, p. 64.

*Secure Europe in a Better World.*²⁹ Even though Europe is not a superpower, it is still a global player whose security interests have a worldwide dimension.³⁰ It is therefore legitimate to compare the rogue state concept with the EU threat model. According to the EU report, the following threats can be identified: (1) Global terrorism linked to violent religious extremism; (2) Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; (3) Regional conflicts; (4) State collapse and (5) Organised crime. Moreover, the document links some of those threats together, because terrorism and organised criminality can prosper within failed states.³¹

There are clearly commonalities between the two reports in terms of global terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Yet, there are also several major differences: First, the EU targets global, religious, terrorism (such as Al-Qaeda), which is not directly linked to supporting states, while the rogues' model targets state sponsored terrorism, even though, practically the US fights against non-state actors in Afghanistan. Second, the EU identifies the threat of collapsing states, in the context of regional conflicts, while the US sees less instable states threatening the regional balance. Furthermore, the EU evaluates organised criminality as a global security issue.

Thus, while there is some similarity between both models, the EU one describes a broader palette of threats, and this is supported by the current academic literature on modern conflicts.³² Klare would seem to be right in suggesting that the rogue state concept focuses the US political and military thinking onto a subset of probable threats, while impeding ability to think about other.³³

Synthesis

The 'rogue states' paradigm emerges as a threat creation in order to pursue domestic and international policies. Hence, assessing the threat level of 'rogue states' and evaluating whether it has been 'exaggerated' is intricate because (1) the concept lacks a formal definition, and (2) there is not a generic threat arising from 'rogues states', but rather a specific risk from each one.³⁴

Furthermore, acting according to this framework can lead the US to overreact: Klare asserts rightly

²⁹ Javier Solana, "A Secure Europe in a Better World - European Security Strategy," (European Union, 2003),

³⁰ Ibid., p. 2

³¹ Ibid., p. 4-6.

³² See, for instance, Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars - Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), Ruppert Smith, *The Utility of Force - The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), .

³³ Klare, 'Beyond the Rogues', p. 231.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 207.

that “once U.S. policymakers adopt fixed assumptions regarding the identity of future adversaries, they may be disposed to view any seemingly hostile behaviour by those countries as vital and immediate threat to U.S. security”.³⁵ Moreover, the fact that the US defines a state as a menace, raising the possibility of an intervention, may lead that state to develop WMD to deter the US, generating a self fulfilling prophecy.

Finally, as Litwak argues, integrating different countries under a similar threat “hinders the ability to realize the discrete U.S. objective with respect to these countries individually”.³⁶ On the other hand, the US has displayed the ability to adapt its strategy pragmatically. For instance, the recent talks between the US and North Korea on nuclear disarmament seem to be successful, even though Kim’s regime has been considered a long lasting rogue states.

Having said this, the criticism of the ‘rogue states’ policy does not imply that individual states do not threaten the U.S. or the international order. The international community’s stance on Iran’s and North Korea’s development of WMD shows that proliferation has been a global concern for a long time. Still, a point can be made with Klare and Litwak that, in respect to the spectrum of modern threats, there has been an overemphasis on the threat of rogues.³⁷

Conclusions

In the previous chapters, I have presented the history of the US rogue state concept and shown that it is one of the major frameworks of US defence and foreign policy. Moreover, I have shown that the rogue state concept is not an analytical, but a political concept that does not follow from objective criteria, but rather domestic and pragmatic issues. Finally, there is no precise threat common to the rogues’. The rogue states paradigm appears thus as a rhetorical construct justifying domestic and international policies.

However, there is nothing new under the sun. Throughout history, one can trace a persistent use of epithets to create *l’altre* (the Other) and describe him as an enemy. The ancient Greeks used already the term of ‘barbarian’ to describe the non-Greek, first in terms of language, but also, later, in terms of unacceptable behaviour. Thus, one can link the definition of rogue states with Carl Schmitt’s defining role of the enemy in politics to outline one’s identity. Hence, as he stressed, in his *Concept of the Political*,

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Litwak, *Rogue States*, p. 64.

³⁷ Klare, 'Beyond the Rogues', p. 209., Litwak, *Rogue States*, p. 64.

...The political enemy (...) is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are always possible.³⁸

Bibliography

- Solana, Javier. "A Secure Europe in a Better World - European Security Strategy." European Union, 2003.
- White House. "President Delivers State of the Union Address." Washington DC, 2002.
- Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars - Organized Violence in a Global Era*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity, 2006.
- Keohane, Robert O. . *International institutions and state power: essays in international relations theory*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1989.
- Litwak, Robert S. *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy : Containment after the Cold War*. Washington D.C: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000.
- Parsons, Wayne. *Public Policy : Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis*. Paperback edition 2001 ed, . Cheltenham: Elgar, 1995.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1932].
- Smith, Ruppert. *The Utility of Force - The Art of War in the Modern World*. London: Allen Lane, 2005.
- van Creveld, Martin. *The Transformation of War*, . New York: The Free Press, 1991.
- White House. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*. Washington DC: , 2006.
- Beltran, Jacques. "Les Etats-Unis et le concept de "states of concern" : vers la fin du containment ?" In *Annuaire français de relations internationales*, 625-635. Bruxelles: Editions Bruylant, 2001.
- Klare, M. "Beyond the Rogues: Military Doctrine in a World of Chaos." In *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy* New York: Hill & Wang, 1996.
- Geldenhuis, D. "Beyond the Rogue State Paradigm." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2002): 75-88.
- Klare, Michael. "The Rise and Fall of the "Rogue Doctrine": The Pentagon's Quest for a Post-Cold War Military Strategy." *Middle East Report*, no. 208 (1998, Autumn): 12-15+47.

³⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1932]), p. 27.

Lake, Anthony. "Confronting Backlash States." *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994): 45-55.

Minnerop, Petra. "Rogue States - State Sponsors of Terrorism?" *German Law Journal* 3, no. 9 (2002).