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What is This?

Rebels without a conscience: The evolution of the rogue states narrative in US security policy

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Abstract
This article examines how the foundations of the 'rogue states' security narrative in the United States developed prior to the declaration of the George W. Bush administration's 'Global War on Terror' and President Bush's representation of Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an 'axis of evil'. The article argues that the puzzle of how US post-Cold War foreign and defence policy came to be focused on 'irrational' — but militarily inferior — adversaries can be understood through analysing how actors within the US defence community discursively constructed discrete international crises as the trigger for a major shift in US threat scenarios. This is developed through an examination of two crucial episodes in the construction of post-Cold War US national security interests: the crisis in the Persian Gulf in 1990–1 and the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993–4. The article suggests the importance of historicizing contests over the interpretation of international crises in order to both better understand the process through which a country's national security interests are defined and to gain greater analytical purchase on how security narratives are reconstructed during processes of systemic change.

Introduction
Following the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, the potential international security threats that deviant regimes present — and America's military response — have become *the* central focus of US defence policymaking and have attracted sustained attention from international security scholars (see, for example, Lennon and Eiss, 2004). Former President George W. Bush elevated the problem of 'rogue states'

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to the most urgent threat to US security interests with his infamous depiction of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as constituting an 'axis of evil' in his State of the Union Address in January 2002 (US White House, 2002). This article contributes to the existing critical literature on the concept of 'rogue' state behaviour and the policy problem of deviant regimes through examining the emerging foundations of the rogue states security narrative in the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast to existing accounts, this analysis offers a more comprehensive overview of the emergence and evolution of the rogue states concept prior to the events of 11 September 2001, which served to further accelerate and intensify — rather than transform — existing trends within US security policy. The central argument presented in this article is that the foundations of the contemporary US preoccupation with the problem of rogue states were formed in the elite political contests over competing narratives to define the nature of the post-Cold War era that occurred within the US defence policy community from the late 1980s onwards, long before US military engagement with 'rogue states' gained greater acceptance from the American public during the George W. Bush administration.

These phenomena pose a puzzle for International Relations scholarship: why has the sole superpower centred its defence architecture — including defence strategy and the organization of the armed forces — on a security threat represented by militarily inferior and economically weak developing states? This article examines the discursive process through which the location of the principal threat to US national security objectives shifted away from a powerful and ideologically opposed enemy towards small and isolated developing countries in the post-Cold War era through focusing on the evolution of a new US security narrative centred on deviant regimes. How nations perceive and articulate threats to their security objectives plays an important part in the process of defining a clear national defence policy, which in theory provides the basis for both the design and funding of a country's defence architecture. The political importance of security narratives stems from their role in the defence policymaking process: security narratives help to establish a discursive connection between the articulation of a country's national interests, the identification of specific security threats to these interests and how potential risks to the broader international environment are understood. While the construction of a new security narrative enables defence policymakers to make sense of an uncertain strategic environment and provides cognitive cues that aid the recognition and construction of national security threats, it may also shape how actors within a particular policy community think about policy problems, which can both enable and constrain particular avenues for policy change (see Chilton, 1996: Ch. 3; cf. Hansen, 2006: Ch. 2).

The focus of this article departs from conventional approaches to the study of US security policy, which tend to concentrate on explaining why particular decisions have been made (Doty, 1993: 298; cf. Howorth, 2004: 212). Instead, this article contends that external events have to be first rhetorically constructed as problems and crises in order to serve as catalytic events that attract support for specific defence policy agendas. In other words, events must have a narrated purpose before entering public discourse (cf. Ben-Porath, 2007: 184; Nabers, 2009: 194; Edelman, 1988: 12). Rather than reproducing the assumption that security policy and national security interests are merely the result of *either* domestic political struggles *or* 'objective' external threats, this article's concentration on the role of catalytic events illustrates how the international environment can affect domestic political processes through empowering some actors while

disempowering others depending on their discursive strategies, which then alters the internal distribution of political power (see Lobell, 2006; Müller and Risse-Kappen, 1993; Narizny, 2003).

The article is organized as follows. The first section explores how elite actors seek to navigate a new and uncertain policy environment following a systemic shock such as the end of the Cold War. While systemic crises are commonly assumed to provide a window of opportunity for rapid institutional change and policy reform, I argue that the uncertainty generated by a sudden shift to a new international security environment may instead serve to constrain the potential for significant change to be achieved and can create a bias towards preserving the status quo. The second section focuses on the evolution of the principal characteristics of deviant regimes in US security discourse, and shows how the 'rogue states' security narrative was built upon pre-existing discursive foundations as a response to the end of the Cold War that emerged from inter-agency bargaining processes, status quo interests and the absorption of competing security narratives. The third and fourth sections examine two catalytic events in the early 1990s that I identify as crucial episodes in the development of an overarching rogue states security narrative in the US: the crisis in the Persian Gulf in 1990–1 and the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993–4. The article concludes that while 'rogue states' may constitute a very real and salient threat to US national security interests, the construction of a new security narrative after the end of the Cold War, whereby a group of Third World countries were identified as the most immediate and critical threat to the security of the world's sole remaining superpower, was the result of a politically-driven discursive process that helped to preserve important elements of the status quo in US defence policy.

An important caveat to note is that the article does not investigate the questions of when, which and how deviant regimes may (or may not) pose a threat to international stability, propose solutions on how to best deal with these 'rogue states', or explore the nature of deviant regimes and which countries should fall under this category (cf. Nincic, 2005; Derrida, 2005; Brookes, 2005; Smith, 2006). Instead, this article provides a comprehensive account of the emergence of rogue states as the principal threat to US national security and highlights the active role played by US defence policymakers in the evolution of the 'rogue states' security narrative.

Uncertainty after a systemic shock

The construction of a security narrative based on 'credible' external threats has long been regarded as a key activity of interest coalitions within the US defence establishment to legitimize the creation and maintenance of a large defence sector and high levels of military expenditures (Senghaas, 1972: 60–63; 1981: 168–172). Security narratives are particularly effective if they capture the essence of threats and an interpretation of the national security environment in terms that relate to the audience's existing interpretive framework (Ben-Porath, 2007: 182). The veneer of legitimacy implied by a coherent overarching security narrative provides an important source of leverage in pursuing specific defence policy interests. The more established a security narrative becomes, and the stronger the discursive connection between a particular defence policy agenda and the overarching narrative, the more a security narrative serves to attract wider political support for these policy goals and marginalizes political resistance.

Catalytic events such as international crises play a crucial role in the articulation, definition and dissemination of a new security narrative, which is the central empirical focus of this article. Like throwing fuel on a fire, such events can act as an accelerant for policy change, and provide momentum that helps to establish and consolidate a new security narrative through the re-articulation of defence policy goals within a new discursive context. As this article demonstrates, a catalytic event does not punctuate an equilibrium in the sense that ideas for policy change develop in response to the event. Rather, a catalytic event can enable the integration of ideas that existed within a narrow policy community *prior* to the event into the wider public debate and political agenda through fostering security narrative development and amplifying existing perceptions of security risks. Whether an external security episode serves as a catalytic event is to a large extent dependent on the ability of elite actors to facilitate an interpretation of the episode in a way that is consistent, framed and interlinked with both an emergent (or established) security narrative and a particular policy agenda. In short, actors intentionally *transform* the raw material of external changes into catalytic events (or not) — there is nothing intrinsic about security episodes that determines the political priority and particular symbolic meaning that is subsequently attached to them.

Numerous scholars have pointed out that such 'critical junctures' or 'tipping points' (Collier and Collier, 1991; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 895–897) may open up windows of opportunity that increase the potential for elite actors to enact major policy changes and radical institutional transformation (Keeler, 1993; Krasner, 1984). Because it removed the principal external threat to US security, and thereby the strategic rationale for maintaining high defence spending and a large defence sector, the end of the Cold War created a window of opportunity for the transformation of US defence planning, which could have enabled radical changes of existing institutional arrangements and budget priorities in the political economy of US defence policy. Yet contrary to these expectations, US defence expenditures at the end of the 1990s were almost as high as the annual Cold War average — and have since exceeded Cold War spending peaks (CDI, 2004) — while the institutional arrangements for the making of US defence policy did not undergo radical changes in the aftermath of the Cold War.

When the old rules of the game no longer apply, actors may struggle not only to determine an appropriate course of action, but also to reformulate the terms of policy debates in a way that advances their interests. Structural crises introduce 'discursive uncertainty', whereby the ideational links that bind together material interests, normative beliefs, cognitive models and programmes for action within a given policy community are loosened. Actors must interpret the implications of systemic changes before they can respond to them: rather than following a preset course of action or policy direction in how they respond to systemic changes, actors must find a way to navigate the 'pervasive constraint' of uncertainty (Rathbun, 2007: 537; Widmaier, 2007: 780–782, cf. Blyth, 2003). The creation and shaping of shared ideas is important because they allow actors to rationalize discursive uncertainty and help to solve collective action and coalition-building problems (cf. Blyth, 2002: 35). This means that actors tend to react and adapt to systemic changes through engaging in efforts to create and shape shared ideas, in order to understand both the meaning of a structural crisis and how to act in response to it (Widmaier et al., 2007: 748; cf. Wendt, 1999: 130). This can result in a continuation of past practices

and the reproduction of prior ontological assumptions, which are simply aligned with changed conceptions. Even when faced with a systemic shock that transforms the international environment, actors 'want to perceive the events around us as congruent with our assumptions, even if that means distorting, denying, projecting, or in other ways falsifying to ourselves what may be going on around us' (Schein, 1992: 22). In short, the generation of a new ideational framework for defence planning in the form of a security narrative, which identifies a new strategic rationale for the use of military power in a changed environment, can potentially allow for a continuation of 'business as usual'. Systemic changes may consequently create a status quo bias.

There are three key reasons for this. First, because they have to be interpreted before actors can respond to them, systemic shocks are more likely to be seen through the prism of actors' previous experiences, existing policy goals and cognitive frameworks. In this respect, actors' existing 'preferences often drive interpretation and not the reverse' (Rathbun, 2007: 547). This point has also been made in cognitive foreign policy analysis, such as the need for Cold War-era policymakers to have a clearly identified 'enemy' against which US security interests can be defined (cf. Axelrod, 1976; Silverstein, 1989; Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995; Rosati, 2000). Second, a systemic change creates uncertainty regarding the distribution of gains and losses from potential reform (Fernandez and Rodrik, 1991: 1146). When actors are unsure who will be the winners and losers from structural reform this can generate strong incentives for resisting change. An uncertain environment may therefore prompt actors — especially those with entrenched policy interests — to draw upon existing practices and policy goals to seek to maintain the status quo. The creation and shaping of shared ideas to reformulate the terms of debates in a way that suits their interests may thereby serve as a potent weapon for actors to achieve their policy goals. Finally, while a systemic shock impacts upon existing institutions, the configuration of extant institutional arrangements also influences how actors respond to a structural crisis. While conflicts may suddenly come to an end and strategic opponents may literally disappear from the strategic map as the Soviet Union did in 1991, the infrastructure, institutions and networks that have been built up in preparation for armed conflict exert considerable staying power. The key to understanding why structural crises are translated into policy change or continuity is therefore to analyse how the main actors involved seek to navigate the uncertainty that is generated by systemic changes, and in particular how they redefine their interests and policy goals in an uncertain environment. Rather than focusing on explaining why individual policymakers' beliefs alter or remain static (cf. Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992; Rosati, 2000), this article is focused on understanding how a broadly shared security narrative developed in response to systemic uncertainty — regardless of changes or continuity in individual actors' cognitive beliefs.

The evolution of the rogue states concept

In the early post-Cold War era, key actors in US defence policymaking, including President George H.W. Bush and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, increasingly presented a heightened level of uncertainty about the new strategic environment per se as the pre-eminent threat to US national security, rather than employing

uncertainty simply as a metaphor for the growing confusion about new security challenges and opportunities after the systemic shock to the international system (US House of Representatives, 1992: 11–12; US Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992; US White House, 1991). In a rapid shift in US security discourse, the threat that the confrontation with the Soviet Union had previously posed to US national security for four decades was now declared 'familiar' and 'predictable' (Payne, 2001: 88–89; 2003: 423–426; cf. US White House, Bush, 1990a, 1997, 1998). The strategic use and reification of global 'uncertainty' as a representation of *the* threat to US security, interests and values initially provided key actors in US defence policymaking with a useful political resource to legitimate the protection of the US defence sector from more severe budgetary reductions and radical institutional transformation. Apart from functioning to temporarily preserve the status quo, however, this narrative of uncertainty alone did not provide a solid basis for the formulation of a new post-Cold War defence strategy that could resonate within both the US defence establishment and the broader context of the US political system.

This reified notion of uncertainty as the principal threat to US national security remained a core term in the lexicon of US defence planning during the 1990s and beyond. Yet it became an effective tool for key actors in US defence policymaking to advance their policy goals only when the notion of systemic uncertainty in international affairs was linked to an allegedly growing number of 'irrational' and 'unpredictable' adversaries that engaged in asymmetric approaches to warfare and, above all, that were willing to employ weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism to achieve their strategic goals. Such 'norm deviants' were considered highly dangerous precisely because it was believed that they could not be influenced or contained by appealing to existing international standards of behaviour, such as the 'taboos' against the use of nuclear or chemical weapons (Price, 1997; Tannenwald, 1999). The labels that US policymakers have attached to these perceived antagonists — as well as the meaningful content connected with those labels — have varied over time. Among other things, they have been called 'pariah states', 'outlaw states', 'renegade states', 'backlash states' or 'states of concern'. However, the most prominent and enduring term ascribed to them is the 'rogue state' label.

The US concept of rogue states, which depicts distant 'Third World' countries as the greatest threat to peace and stability since the end of the Cold War (Hoyt, 2000: 1), can be broken down into three primary components. First, rogue states violate international human rights norms with respect to their own populations. Second, rogue states are perceived to exhibit a willingness either to directly engage in or to sponsor terrorism. Finally, rogue states seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction, as well as the means to deliver them across state borders. These key components were not initially employed collectively within a single security narrative to portray a group of isolated and less developed countries as posing the principal threat to US national security and undermining fundamental principles of international society. Rather, they became gradually subsumed under the single umbrella term 'rogue states' in a three-step process.

During the 1970s, the terms rogue, pariah or outlaw state were initially related to a government's domestic policy, such as the brutal repression of its own society, and was used to describe oppressive regimes including those of Pol Pot in Cambodia and Idi Amin in Uganda (cf. Litwak, 2000: 7). Potential threats to neighbouring countries, or

any other conduct that jeopardized international stability which stemmed from a disregard for international norms, initially played little part in a state's designation by US policymakers as a rogue or pariah regime. Over the next two decades, however, the use of the rogue state label in the US gradually shifted away from simply condemning the *domestic* policies of these regimes towards describing rogue states both as a major source of instability and uncertainty in the international system, and as the chief threat to US national security.

The first step in this direction was taken through establishing a discursive connection between rogue states and international terrorism. In this respect, the conventional assumption that this link was primarily a consequence of the George W. Bush administration's interpretation of the tragic events of 11 September 2001 is incorrect. Rather, the identification of state support of terrorism as a key component of the contemporary rogue state concept began to enter mainstream US political debates two decades earlier, when President Ronald Reagan rhetorically connected the repressive nature of regimes that were viewed as hostile to the United States with sponsoring acts of international terrorism (Henriksen, 2001; cf. Paust, 1986: 711). In the mid-1980s, for example, President Reagan described Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua as 'outlaw governments', as the 'core group of radical and totalitarian governments' and as the 'confederation of terrorist states' (Reagan, 1985). This linking of terrorism to the foreign policies of repressive 'rogue regimes' represented a shift in focus with respect to peripheral US security concerns, from concentrating on terrorist organizations per se to state-sponsored terrorism, and from the illicit conduct of domestic policy as the main criterion for a 'rogue' in the international community of states to the violation of behavioural norms in international affairs (Klare, 1995: 26).

The final key component of the contemporary US rogue states concept is the desire of these regimes to acquire weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear capabilities, and the means to deliver them. In academic debates, concern about this connection was raised during the 1970s and 1980s (see Dror, 1971; Harkavy, 1977, 1981). In contrast to the contemporary US rogue states concept, however, the desire of internationally isolated countries to acquire nuclear capabilities was not initially regarded as an expression of regional and international aggression. Instead it related to questions of regime stability and regional power asymmetries. With respect to the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction prior to the end of the Cold War, the rogue states label was attached to states that shared one overriding concern: national survival in geographical regions where the conventional military balance was tilted against them.

Notably, the weapons capabilities of developing countries initially played only a complementary role to the threat posed by the 'evil empire' of the Soviet Union in US threat scenarios. Anxiety about the horizontal proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of advanced weaponry to 'Third World' countries started to increase within the US defence establishment and to gain political currency in debates about US national security shortly before the Cold War came to a close (Klare, 1995: 18–22). In particular, US policymakers increasingly labelled 'Third World' countries that aimed to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction in terms that had previously been limited to states that were supposedly engaged in terrorist activities, describing them as 'outlaws', 'renegades' and 'rogues' (Klare, 1995: 27; Litwak, 2000: 47–56). Yet key actors in the US

defence policymaking process began to combine the repressive nature of a regime with the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them under the single umbrella term 'rogue states' only after the end of the Cold War. This suggests that the existence of 'rogue states' themselves cannot account for the reconfiguration of US threat scenarios during the 1990s. The origins of a new security policy centred on 'Third World' regimes that refuse to abide by international norms of state behaviour can instead be traced back to the political bargaining processes among US policymakers over the future shape of the US defence sector. This process began in the late 1980s prior to the end of the Cold War as a response to indications of a diminishing Soviet threat and a domestic political and economic climate in which Congress and the US public increasingly demanded the rethinking of US defence policy in general, and the reduction of military budgets in particular (Powell, 1989; cf. US White House, 1989).

By the time the superpower hostilities came to an end the contours of a new strategic consensus had already formed among different groups of actors within the US force-planning community, which included the need to maintain the military capabilities to fight two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously. In this force-planning framework, scenarios involving 'Third World' countries armed with 'First World weapons' as an independent threat from the superpower conflict had gradually replaced many of the Soviet-centred contingency plans as a basis for structuring, sizing and equipping the US armed forces (Klare, 1995: 22; see also Jaffe, 1993; Larson et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 1992; Snider, 1993). Yet when the Cold War ended, these conceptual underpinnings for determining the size, structure and capabilities of the armed forces in the post-Cold War era still lacked an overarching security narrative that could serve as a persuasive rationale to justify and rally support behind this force-planning approach. This new security narrative only evolved after the Cold War, when the three separate discourses on rogue states and human rights violations, rogue states and support of terrorism, and rogue states and weapons of mass destruction were gradually linked together to form the primary components of the contemporary US rogue states concept.

The two security episodes explored in the following two sections, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the 1993–4 North Korean nuclear crisis, were crucial to the proliferation of the idea that 'Third World' 'rogues' represented the principal threat to US national security objectives. Both episodes served to validate the focus of the US force-planning community on potential regional instabilities in the less developed world as the conceptual foundations for determining the size, structure and capabilities of the armed forces for the post-Cold War era. Fostered by these catalytic events, the gradual evolution of the rogue states security narrative enabled the notion that rogue states represented the key threat to US national security in the post-Cold War era to become credibly established although they had previously constituted a peripheral US security concern, thereby providing a rationale that allowed US defence policymakers to align new threat scenarios with existing strategic models as well as furnishing a credible strategic rationale for resisting more radical restructuring proposals and deeper cuts to military budgets.

Confirming the threat scenario: Iraqi aggression

In the decade before the end of the Cold War, Iraq was seldom listed among the group of 'Third World' states that were perceived as direct threats to US security interests. During

a speech before the American Bar Association in 1985, for instance, President Reagan warned his audience of the dangers presented by 'a confederation of terrorist states', but left Iraq off the list (Reagan, 1985). At the time, the US still supported Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran. Five years later, on 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and coalition forces from 34 nations under US leadership subsequently launched Operation Desert Storm with massive air strikes on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 678 on 17 January 1991. Less than seven weeks later, with US forces having sustained comparably few casualties, ceasefire talks began on 3 March 1991.

The war in the Persian Gulf was described as an overwhelming success in many respects (see Nye and Smith, 1992). For example, the rapid defeat of Saddam Hussein with limited US casualties ended the Vietnam syndrome in the US military and broad spectra of US society that had restrained the overt use of US military force for two decades. The joint opposition of the US and Russia against Iraq also appeared to open up a window of opportunity for cooperation between the two former superpower rivals that was hard to imagine only two years earlier. In addition, the war against Iraq under the umbrella of the United Nations demonstrated an unprecedented ability on the part of the international community to act in concert against military aggression, and boosted the perception of a shared responsibility for justice and the importance of international law. The Gulf War's lasting legacy with respect to US defence policy, however, was to validate the new US military posture based, first, on the threats posed by 'Third World' countries that were armed with advanced weaponry, including weapons of mass destruction, which had lacked an actual adversary before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and, second, on a heavy, mechanized ground force supported by air superiority fighters and precision fighter-bombers. This defence posture was originally designed for military engagement with the Soviet Union in Europe but continued to remain a central element in US force planning for the post-Cold War era (Jaffe, 1993; Larson et al., 2001: 13–16; Troxell, 1997: 12; cf. Aspin, 1993).

The US defence establishment had started to reassess threats to US national security interests during the late 1980s. For example, a report entitled *Discriminate Deterrence* by the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy (CILTS), published in January 1988, emphasized that the US should address a wider range of contingencies than a Warsaw Pact attack on Central Europe or an all-out Soviet nuclear attack (CILTS, 1988: 2). The Commission advised the Pentagon to focus on the rise of major powers such as Japan and China (CILTS, 1988: 6–8), as well as the threat posed by less developed countries that increasingly had access to advanced weaponry such as medium-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction (CILTS, 1988: 9–10). In another 1988 report, an influential conservative Washington-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), also suggested that regional 'mavericks' constituted a new class of 'Third World' powers, which posed 'new risks' to US national security through 'potent arsenals' of modern weapons (Opstal and Goldberg, 1988: xiii). Similarly, CIA director William H. Webster argued in a series of speeches, statements and congressional hearings between 1988 and 1989 that 'the Soviet Union is certainly not our only focus', because 'Third World' countries were increasingly engaged in the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (Webster, 1988, 1989a, 1989b). As a result, although they had originally been incorporated within US strategic planning only as a complement to the Soviet threat, 'well-equipped regional powers', in particular those in the 'Third

World', which were 'armed with "First World" weapons' gradually emerged within US security discourse as an independent threat from the superpower conflict *before* the Cold War came to a close (Klare, 1995: 22).

When the Department of Defense started to reassess threats in 'key regions' and to develop a 'regional defence strategy' in late 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this shifted the focus of defence planning away from the Soviet threat to 'Third World' adversaries (cf. Vesser, 1991; US OSD, 1992; Cheney, 1993). A *White House Fact Sheet on the National Security Strategy Report* in March 1990 confirmed this shift in focus, noting that the US needed improved capabilities in order to address the 'unique requirements posed by potential Third World battlefields, themselves growing in complexity and lethality' (US White House, 1990). On the day Iraq invaded Kuwait, President George H.W. Bush officially announced that the new direction of US defence planning was to prepare for regional contingencies in the face of 'serious threats to important U.S. interests wholly unrelated to the earlier patterns of the U.S.–Soviet relationship' (Bush, 1990b; cf. Bush, 1990c). He argued that 'the brutal aggression' by Iraq against Kuwait had confirmed his central thesis that 'terrorism, hostagetaking, renegade regimes and unpredictable rulers' now constituted the chief threat to US national security and the stability of the international system (Bush, 1990b). In the following weeks, President Bush increasingly presented Iraq as a deviant regime that threatened the stability of the international society of states. On 20 August 1990, for example, he described Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as a 'ruthless assault on the very essence of international order and civilized ideals', rather than simply a 'military attack' (Bush, 1990d).

To gather domestic and international support for a military intervention in the Persian Gulf, in the months between the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the beginning of Operation Desert Storm, President Bush increasingly personalized Iraq's patterns of misbehaviour in the international community by employing a 'Saddam Hussein–Adolf Hitler analogy' (Lewis, 2001: 158). On 9 August 1990, for example, he argued that 'appeasement does not work. As was the case in the 1930s, we see in Saddam Hussein an aggressive dictator threatening his neighbors' (Bush, quoted in Dionne, 1990). Indeed, President Bush compared the Iraqi dictator to Adolf Hitler almost on a daily basis before the coalition's forces launched their first air strikes, an analogy that the media helped to confirm in the public arena through uncritical repetition (Dormann and Livingston, 1994: 71). Furthermore, key actors in US defence policymaking castigated Saddam Hussein's actions by portraying 'the reformable dictator of the 1980s' as 'the demon aggressor of the early 1990s' (Bin et al., 1998: 33), who had irrationally 'demonstrated a proclivity to use any and all forms of warfare, against civilian as well as military targets' (Cheney, 1990: 18).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Iraqi aggression in the early 1990s for the validation of the shift in the focus of US national security away from Cold War threat scenarios. Iraq's attack on Kuwait subsequently served as *the* principal example in the Pentagon's attempts to validate the new focus of US defence planning on 'Third World' countries that possess advanced weaponry and are potentially armed with weapons of mass destruction. As well as the maintenance of the core of the Cold War force structure and military equipment in order to counter this threat, including the potential for the US to engage in two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously that has persisted

as the key force-planning framework despite changes in political leadership (see, for example, Aspin, 1993; Cohen, 1997; Rumsfeld, 2001; US Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992). As Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney argued before members of Congress on 19 March 1991: 'the Gulf war presaged … the type of conflict we are most likely to confront again … major regional contingencies against foes well-armed with advanced conventional and unconventional munitions' (Cheney, quoted in Reich and Gotowicki, 1991: 254). Similarly, President Bush suggested that Iraq represented 'a test case for the most difficult security challenges we are likely to face in the future.… From Qadhafi in Libya to Kim Il-song in North Korea, the threats on our horizon could look a lot like the threat we turned back in Iraq' (Bush, 1992). Although the rogue state terminology was not yet applied by key actors in the US defence establishment to describe potential 'Third World' antagonists, the Gulf War encouraged the linking together of what were previously largely independent discourses on rogue states and human rights violations, and rogue states and weapons of mass destruction.

The war in the Persian Gulf also provided an opportunity for members of Congress who were reluctant to agree to more extensive cuts in defence spending to emphasize that uncertainty would be the defining feature in the post-Cold War world, rather than a peaceful coexistence among nations. This involved a political struggle between competing narratives to define the nature of the post-Cold War era, the outcome of which has had long-term consequences for the making of US defence policy. On 9 April 1992, for instance, the Senate voted against a proposal brought forward by Senator J. James Exon (D-Neb) to cut Bush's military spending plan by an additional amount of less than 2 percent, or US$4.2 billion. The proposal was defeated because of widespread Democratic resistance to deeper cuts in the defence budget. According to Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan), the reason why Democrats joined Republican Senators in rejecting deeper cuts to the defence budget was that past experience had demonstrated that 'enemies like Iraq's Saddam Hussein arose unexpectedly' (Dole, quoted in Fram, 1992).

Despite broad bipartisan support in Congress, these arguments against more extensive cuts to the defence budget initially failed to gain widespread political currency or public acceptance. This was partly a result of the acknowledgement by congressional policymakers that the main motivation for keeping military spending at a relatively high level was rooted in pork-barrel domestic politics rather than international affairs. For example, while Representative Sherwood Boehlert (R-Utica) argued that the US needed a strong military despite the diminished communist threat because the US had to prevent despots such as Iraq's Saddam Hussein from becoming 'adventurous' in the future, he acknowledged that more extensive defence cuts would significantly increase unemployment not only in the US in general, but in his own congressional district in particular (Boehlert, quoted in Wilson, 1992). Similarly, liberal Democrats, who had previously tended to favour vigorous cuts in US military expenditures, now began to publicly defend defence contractors and the Cold War weapons programmes they produced (Lochead, 1992). In light of these parochial interests, Senator Exon blamed the defeat of his proposed cuts to the Bush administration's defence budget on the military–industrial complex, which he argued was 'still alive and well' (Exon, quoted in Fram, 1992).

The Pentagon made extensive efforts to tie Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait to a broader discourse on the threat of the use and proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction by an allegedly growing number of regionally aggressive 'Third World' countries. However, the US defence establishment failed to support the redirection of US defence policy with a widely accepted strategic vision, which could help to justify military spending through the clear definition, representation and consolidation of potential risks to national security interests. Paradoxically, the 'vision thing' that helped to resolve this problem and to preserve relatively high levels of US military spending in the post-Cold War era only emerged after Bill Clinton, who had promised deeper defence cuts and a renewed focus on US domestic problems, was elected president. The subsequent inflation of the rogue states threat was triggered by the actions of a 'familiar' former US antagonist in Asia soon after President Clinton took office, North Korea.

North Korea's nuclear ambitions

The second catalyst in the development of an overarching rogue states narrative to group together the perceived threat posed by 'deviant regimes' in the post-Cold War era was provided by North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In 1992, North Korea agreed to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct inspections of its entire nuclear programme as required under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had signed in 1985. Because US intelligence indicated that North Korea was reprocessing plutonium in two undeclared sites contrary to the DPRK's declarations, the outgoing George H.W. Bush administration and the Pentagon began raising concerns about North Korea's intentions in late 1992 (Smith, 2006: 65–67). The tensions between the DPRK and the US further increased when North Korea violated a number of agreements that had been negotiated between mid-1988 and late 1992 in an attempt to both decrease tensions with South Korea and to bring to a halt the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme. In January 1993, for example, North Korea began to block a series of IAEA inspections and to operate nuclear reprocessing facilities, thereby violating the 1991 South–North Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (Cronin, 1994). The incoming Clinton administration attempted to exert pressure on Pyongyang by threatening to report its violations to the United Nations Security Council (Samore, 2003: 9), which could potentially result in economic sanctions or other punitive measures against North Korea.

North Korea's announcement of its withdrawal from the NPT on 12 March 1993 as a response to these measures was the final straw that broke the camel's back for members of the US foreign policy community, who had long viewed the DPRK as threatening US national security, regional stability in Asia and the stability of the international system. Key members of the US defence establishment opposed US dialogue and diplomatic engagement with North Korea and instead urged Clinton to pursue a hard-line policy to resolve the crisis, including the use of military force (Katz, 2003: 1; cf. Millot, 1994). When the US was at the brink of war with North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme, the immediate crisis was resolved in the middle of 1994 through the negotiation of the Agreed Framework, which forestalled both military actions and the imposition of economic sanctions (see Cotton, 1998/9). Although North Korea subsequently appeared to move towards a more norm-abiding approach in its conduct of international affairs, many conservative policymakers voiced sharp criticism against the agreement

and described it as the result of Clinton giving in to nuclear blackmail (Howard, 2004: 814–817). North Korea has been on the Pentagon's list of potential enemies since the early days of the Cold War, and following its actions in 1993 it also gained a firm place in the gallery of US rogue states.

The 1993–4 North Korean nuclear crisis had a profound impact on the development of an overarching US rogue states narrative in three main respects. First, with a particular focus on weapons of mass destruction, the rogue states terminology began to be officially applied to describe the chief threat to US national interests amidst the height of the tensions with the DPRK. A study conducted by Paul D. Hoyt (2000) on the rise of the rogue states image in American foreign policy between 1993 and 1998 demonstrates the increasing use of the rogue states terminology in US security discourses. Using the built-in search engines of the White House, the Department of State, the Department of Defense and CIA web pages, Hoyt generated a database on the basis of all documents mentioning the term 'rogue' from the Clinton administration. The results show that the first reference to rogue states was made early in the Clinton administration, in January 1994. Over time, usage of the term became considerably more frequent in general, and also became more widespread across different agencies and departments. In particular, the increased emphasis on rogue states in Pentagon documents from mid-1994 onwards contributed to a rise of the total numbers of annual agency mentions of the term (Hoyt, 2000: 298–301).

Second, the North Korean nuclear crisis had a major impact on the development of US policy options aimed at countering the threats posed by rogue states with access to weapons of mass destruction. In December 1993, for example, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced that the Pentagon had launched a new programme, the 'Defense Counterproliferation Initiative', to counter the perceived increased threat posed by 'Third World' countries armed with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, which included developing a range of new military capabilities (Abrams, 1993). In a *Foreign Affairs* article in spring 1994, Clinton's National Security Advisor Anthony Lake (1994: 45–46) emphasized that the outlaws Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya were 'often aggressive and defiant', shared a 'siege mentality' and had the potential to threaten the international community with advanced weaponry, in particular weapons of mass destruction and missile delivery systems. Invoking George Kennan's 1947 strategy, Lake explicitly laid out a strategy of 'dual containment' towards the 'backlash' states of Iran and Iraq as part of the US objective to develop 'a strategy to neutralize, contain and, through selective pressure, perhaps eventually transform' these states (Lake, 1994: 46). Applying the language of 'containment' to the problem of dealing with rogue states is significant because, similar to its original application to the Soviet threat, the term containment implies the introduction of a carrot-and-stick approach to changing rogue state behaviour, as well as an ambitious attempt at the 'restructuring of geopolitical space' (Chilton, 1996: 134). Lake's article also represented a key moment in the development of the rogue states narrative because it elevated the emerging rogue states doctrine into official policy. Both the concept of 'counter-proliferation' and the 'dual containment strategy' subsequently became integral parts of Clinton's 1995 *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (cf. US White House, 1995: 13, 30).

Finally, the North Korean nuclear crisis contributed significantly to the proliferation of the rogue states terminology in political discourse outside the branches of US government. Among other things, for actors to take advantage of such catalytic events to promote particular policy agendas 'requires planning, organization, publicity and political positioning' (Parmar, 2005: 8). In light of North Korea's potential nuclear ambitions and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related technologies, conservative US think thanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute, began to actively engage in the proliferation and consolidation of the rogue states terminology (see www.heritage.org).

A similar effect can be observed in US mainstream news media. The increasing use of the rogue states terminology by US media outlets is important because the media can shape what issues people think about with respect to security policy (Cohen, 1963: 13), and influence how well the views of elite actors resonate within the broader societal context (cf. Widmaier et al., 2007: 749). A search of the Lexis-Nexis database for 'major mentions' of the 'rogue states' label in all US news media shows the impact of the North Korea–US nuclear crisis on the development of an overarching rogue states narrative. Despite the war in the Persian Gulf against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which later became the 'model' rogue state, only two newspaper articles mentioned the term 'rogue state' in 1992 — one in relation to human rights and one with respect to fissile material. In 1993, US news organizations began to report on 'rogue states' more frequently: 12 newspaper articles used the term and seven made an explicit connection between nuclear weapons, missile technology, proliferation and North Korea. While Iran was counted as a rogue state in five of the 1993 newspaper articles, Iraq was mentioned only twice. One year later, over 30 newspaper articles mentioned the term 'rogue state', many of them now referring to North Korea, along with Iraq and Iran, as 'the archetypal rogue state' (Sigal, 1994: 22). By 1996 the 'rogue state' concept had become firmly rooted in the US news media vocabulary: the term 'rogue state' was mentioned in 129 newspaper articles and has not fallen under the benchmark of 100 in any year since. The increased attention paid by conservative US think tanks and by the US news media suggests that the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme served as a stimulus both to popularize the notion of the danger posed by 'rogue states' through their alleged ambitions to join the nuclear club, and to further the development of an overarching rogue states narrative.

The introduction of the rogue states narrative into wider debates on US security policy had three important side effects on the US discourse on weapons proliferation. First, while the main non-proliferation concern until the end of the Cold War was centred on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, with the emergence of the rogue states narrative the discourse shifted towards the broader concept of weapons of mass destruction, and proliferation concerns were therefore no longer focused on nuclear weapons (Kristensen, 2005: 1). Second, counter-proliferation gradually replaced non-proliferation as the main US strategy to prevent the spread of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons. In contrast to Cold War efforts to halt the vertical and horizontal proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, US counter-proliferation efforts are now squarely aimed at preventing the horizontal proliferation of WMD and stress more proactive and unilateral military approaches, including pre-emptive military measures, rather than collective approaches to arms control and

disarmament or multilateral non-proliferation regimes. While the Clinton administration continued to place considerable emphasis on more traditional arms control mechanisms supplemented with counter-proliferation should these efforts fail (US White House, 1995), the George W. Bush administration subsequently focused mainly on US military means. These efforts included the threat of pre-emptive nuclear strikes against rogue states and the pursuit of regime change as outlined in the 2002 *Nuclear Posture Review* and *National Security Strategy*.

Finally, the introduction and consolidation of the rogue states narrative enabled the return of a familiar concept in US defence policy: containment. As discussed earlier, the concept of containment implies a real threat from an aggressive enemy that must be restrained, if necessary by military force, and establishes a link with the interpretive framework that guided Cold War defence planning. Indeed, as Roland Bleiker (2003: 721) has observed, '[t]he rhetoric of rogue states is indicative of how US foreign policy continues to be driven by dualistic and military Cold War thinking patterns' (see also Smith, 2000). Yet how actors draw lessons from the past — and how they apply these lessons in the present — is shaped 'less by history than by the frames applied to that history' (Levitt and March, 1988: 324). This is important because the discursive construction of a link between contemporary security challenges and historical 'lessons' helps to orient policy solutions to new security threats in a familiar direction. Moreover, because terms like 'containment' retain a strong political resonance in America that elides the contextual differences between the present and the past, they frame and limit political debates on the use of US force by representing contemporary security challenges and the 'evils' of the past as equivalent (see Homolar-Riechmann, 2009).

The construction of an overarching security narrative that located the principal threat to US national security in the behaviour of rogue states built upon the three primary components discussed earlier: human rights violations, international terrorism and the pursuit and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Of these three components, the latter two were usually given the most prominence during the 1990s (cf. Tanter, 1999; Litwak, 2000). Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, while the connection between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction was significant for the development of the rogue states narrative, it is the oppressive nature of a regime that has provided the rationale for US policymakers to include the first and second main components of the US rogue states concept under a single umbrella term. In particular, this enabled the interpretation by key actors in US defence policymaking after the end of the Cold War that rogue states' disregard for the fate of their own populations constituted a threat to the US and a risk to the stability of the international system.

This interpretation of rogue states' intentions is based on the assumption that a regime that severely restricts and violates civil liberties — and exhibits a willingness to commit ruthless crimes against its own population — has less interest in avoiding human casualties in the conduct of its foreign policy, and is not simply the consequence of the violation of international human rights norms. Combined with the high degree of domestic control that the leadership of a 'rogue state' arguably enjoys over its own society, this apparent indifference to the domestic consequences of its actions in the international arena is believed to grant an oppressive regime greater freedom of action in its foreign policy conduct. This assumption about rogue states' internal behaviour has provided the

main rationale for how their international behaviour is interpreted, which key actors in US defence policymaking after the end of the Cold War have used to portray rogue states as constituting the chief threat to US national security and the main source of uncertainty in the international system.

Because they violate human rights norms, rogue states are assumed to act outside the standards of 'civilized' international society and international law. Moreover, because the loss of civilian lives is not considered to be a dominant feature in their strategic calculations, rogue states are assumed to be insensitive to traditional instruments of statecraft to influence a country's foreign policy, such as economic sanctions or the threat of military retaliation. By definition, rogue states are 'undeterrable'. As a result, such regimes are believed to be inherently 'unpredictable' — and may therefore behave 'irrationally' in the international arena. This series of assumptions about deviant regimes has constituted a new overarching security narrative that became widely shared among US defence policymakers in the aftermath of the Cold War, and which has enabled a diverse range of US adversaries to be discursively represented as posing a common threat to US national security interests.

Ironically, while rogue states' assumed irrationality has served to justify the US preoccupation with ballistic missile defence and military planning for 'uncertainty', the core of US security policy towards rogue states emphasizes both containment and deterrence as key to counter the threat posed by these deviant regimes (cf. Lake, 1994). Furthermore, although US involvement in peacekeeping operations — including Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti and Kosovo — were the prevalent US military engagements during the 1990s, the US defence community regarded these uses of US military force as mere 'irregularities' and refrained from major revisions to both the US defence architecture and contingency plans. As a result, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the structure, equipment and scenario planning of the US armed forces were little different than at the end of the Cold War, and have proven to be wholly inadequate for contemporary US military operations such as fighting small-scale contingencies, pursuing peacekeeping operations or dealing with asymmetric warfare. The US force that entered the 21st century was essentially just a smaller or shrunken version of the Reagan-era Cold War force (Korb, 2000; Williams, 2001). As a consequence, although the US military easily defeated the Iraqi armed forces in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, it proved ill-equipped for US engagement in the subsequent insurgency.

Conclusion

During the George W. Bush presidency the US preoccupation with the potential security threat posed by militarily inferior rogue states reached new heights, and has continued to shape the (more conciliatory) defence policy agenda pursued by the Obama administration. This article has shown that the rogue states security narrative did not originate with either the Bush administration or America's response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The main contribution of this article to the existing literature on contemporary US foreign and defence policy and the 'rogue states' doctrine has been to comprehensively demonstrate how a new security narrative centred on deviant regimes was gradually pieced together by key actors within the US defence policy community

during the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s as policymakers struggled to formulate a new strategic rationale for the purpose of US military power and the definition of the US national interest in the context of declining Cold War tensions. Too often, the starting point for scholarship on contemporary US foreign and defence policy is the moment when strategic policy shifts become more apparent following key events such as 11 September 2001, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, and apparent public acceptance in the US of the use of military solutions to the rogue states 'problem'. This article suggests the need for further research that concentrates on examining how the discursive foundations of security policy shifts are gradually built behind the scenes through narrative competition among US defence policymakers.

As the article has illustrated, the two distinct security episodes that were most important to the initial development of the rogue states security narrative during the 1990s were the Gulf War in 1991 and the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993–4. How these two events were interpreted by defence policymakers set the scene for the further consolidation of the rogue states narrative in the late 1990s following the renewed crisis with North Korea, the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, and the publication of the report of the Rumsfeld Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States. The deliberate alignment of particular interpretations of these events with an emerging rogue states security narrative helped proponents to provide a strategic rationale for continued high defence spending, the maintenance of Cold War-era weapons systems and force-planning models, and contributed to policy continuity across different presidential administrations in the US. Perhaps most important, because the new rogue states security narrative reflected the collective interests of defence policymakers in maintaining 'business as usual' rather than entering an uncertain process of radical restructuring and transformation, this helps to explain why potential alternative security narratives — such as those based on the need to restructure the US armed forces for multilateral peacekeeping operations and asymmetric warfare rather than conventional wars using major weapons systems and existing force-planning models — failed to achieve the same level of influence on US security policy.

Deviant state behaviour increases 'analytical uncertainty'; that is, uncertainty about how particular regimes view the world and how they act in the international arena, even if there is little strategic uncertainty about the means and capabilities of a particular state (Iida, 1993). Because it is rooted in a perception of irrational behaviour, the US rogue states concept overlaps with this understanding that deviance from fundamental behavioural norms in international society complicates interpreting and predicting how a regime may act in the international arena. What lies at the core of the US conception of rogue states as irrational actors is not their behaviour in international affairs per se, such as the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring or engaging in terrorist acts. Rather, in the contemporary US defence policy context, how states treat their own populations has evolved as the crucial marker to determine whether they are recognized by US policymakers as 'rational' actors in international affairs.

This article has demonstrated how, during the 1990s, US defence policymakers actively engaged in the construction of rogue states as the *primary* threat to US security interests in an attempt to rationalize the discursive uncertainty of the post-Cold War era. The successful construction of a new US security narrative centred on the rogue states

threat relied on discrete events that could be discursively framed and understood within this new strategic vision for US defence policymaking. The deliberate concatenation of two unrelated security episodes within a single interpretive framework enabled key actors in US defence policymaking to subsume previously independent discourses on human rights violations, international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction under a single umbrella term — rogue states — and to portray 'irrational' regimes as a major source of analytical uncertainty in the international system. As this article has illustrated, these two catalytic events served to cement the interpretation that rogue states now pose the main risk to international stability, which contributed to the consolidation of rogue states as the defining feature of the post-Cold War security narrative in the United States over the course of the 1990s. In such an uncertain and unpredictable security environment, the political possibilities for greater cuts in US military spending and radical restructuring of the US defence architecture during the 1990s quickly diminished, and the stage was set for the aggressive defence policies the George W. Bush administration subsequently pursued once the rogue states threat was further amplified following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

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