

Why is There Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States?



February 1, 2026

Abstract

The notion of a rogue state has been a heavily disputed topic among scholars, with both its meaning and analytical utility being at the mercy of much scrutiny and criticism. Some scholars speculate the emergence of the term, while others criticize the terms ambiguity and lack of objectivity. This review seeks to analyze existing literature on diverging responses to rogue states to explain why some states labeled as rogue face sanctions and scrutiny, while other arguably similar regimes are largely overlooked. Rather than viewing the term “rogue state” as a definitive label by which uniform policy decisions may attach, this review will focus on the role political and ideological commitments play in determining which actors are problematized, and which are overlooked. This review charts how a wide spectrum of responses is implicated when considering diverging rhetoric, interests, and commitments.

Introduction

Most scholars would agree that the term “rogue state” is far from an objective analytical category, instead arguing that the term is a political construct historically embedded within the discourse and ideology of American foreign policy. Many academics, including Robert Litwak, trace the term’s emergence to the post-Cold War era, specifically the Pentagon’s quest for a new post-Cold War mission that would help redefine threats after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The term “rogue state” is best understood less as a definitive, widely accepted label and more as a highly debated, flexible, continually shifting rubric. In the absence of a codified set of criteria for what constitutes a “rogue state,” the label acts not as a scholarly concept, but as a rhetorical tool believed by scholars to help legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions. While

policymakers and media outlets routinely use the term “rogue state” to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

Existing research frequently notes that the emergence of the label coincided with the U.S. State Department’s first publication of an annual list of states that sponsored terrorism. Scholars believe their publication to be among the first to contribute to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and dangerous. Three recurring ideas are frequently associated with “rogue state” status: facilitation or sponsorship of terrorism, illicit acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and opposition to dominant power and ideologies. Early commentary in the Washington Post Editorial on Libya’s sponsorship of terrorism in the late 1970s and 1980s set a precedent for the anchoring of facilitation of terrorism as a central indicator of rogue statehood in American discourse (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, the label expanded to encompass states seeking WMD and missile delivery systems, which recast WMD proliferation as a key marker of a “rogue state.” Hence, in the immediate post-Cold War period, academic analysts of WMD proliferation portrayed isolated regimes as potential proliferators, which reinforced the link between isolation, terrorism, and WMD acquisition, even as the strength of this association remained subjective and debated.

The fears and concerns of many analysts were further intensified and amplified when American officials explicitly identified certain regimes as central threats to national security. Former Secretary of State James Baker, during his 1989 Senate remarks, stressed the dangers posed by ballistic missiles and chemical warheads that had fallen into the hands of aggressive, terrorism supporting governments (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). As a result, the supposed threat that “rogue states” posed became a key driving concept in American foreign policy, with the

term being used as an important justification in numerous policy decisions. Former Senator John Tower, for example, justified the continual investment in the B-2 stealth bomber by referencing certain “rogue regimes” having acquired sophisticated air defenses and state-of-the-art weapons (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Even as these attributes of “rogue statehood” were never formally codified, or even universally agreed upon, they became de facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states at the close of the twentieth century.

Politicization and Ambiguity of the Rogue State Label

The term “rogue state” gained mass traction and became more widespread during the Clinton Administration, and following the attacks of September 11, 2001, it went on to drive foreign policy decisions. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, so-called rogue states were identified as the “gravest” threat to American national security (Homolar, 2011). States such as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran were detailed as major threats that would require preemptive and anticipatory action (Homolar, 2011). The National Security Strategy represented the broader shift of American policy from a containment approach to unilateral military intervention, which fundamentally structured policy to be more assertive and proactive, especially regarding states deemed as “rogue.” As a consequence, the preponderance of arms controls and nonproliferation documents habitually underscored efforts that would prevent the leakage of WMD materials and missile technologies into the hands of rogue regimes (O’Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, successive missile defense and military programs were often viewed as the necessary course of action to sustain restrictions on rogue state weapons development and deployment (O’Reilly, 2007). American policy, in the years following, subsisted in treating “rogue states” as the epicenter of threat, even as the criteria for what constituted a rogue state remained vague and extensively contested within academia.

Nevertheless, many scholars believed the term served to fill a conceptual gap within American security strategy, and remained skeptical that the regimes identified as rogue truly constituted a coherent category. When observing states such as North Korea and Cuba, scholars suggested the precariousness they posed was exaggerated into hyperbolic, alarmist terms (Gordy & Lee, 2009). In this sense, the term became a tool for controlling narratives and further justifying American unilateral policy initiatives and interests (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Such analyses demonstrate that this rhetoric served as the foundation for a broad array of policy decisions, yet the establishment of a clear, objective set of criteria was compromised by the vague and selective nature of the label. Absent clear criteria, the politically charged attributes of the label exemplified an overall lack of precision and objectivity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Rather than functioning as a coherent behavioral repertoire, the label, bereft of standardized and transparent mechanisms, drew heavily upon American strategic preferences and interests.

The United States and Rogue State Diplomacy

Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was among the many who believed the United States possessed the unique responsibility to neutralize, contain, and develop strategies to transform so-called rogue states into more constructive members of the international community (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, this way of thinking settled into American discourse, normalizing the idea that certain regimes were uniquely dangerous and required distinctive policy approaches. However, subsequent policy decisions showed that so-called rogue regimes were handled in very different ways.

Scholars have often pointed to the sharp contrast between American approaches to Iraq and North Korea as evidence that the “rogue state” label does not consistently reflect the level of threat, since regimes labeled in a similar appellation prompted notably different policy responses.

For example, in 2002, George Bush declared that North Korea, Iraq, and Iran, all of which were classified as rogue states, were pursuing weapons of mass destruction (Kim & Hundt, 2011). Yet despite the arguably comparable claims about their proliferation risks, the approaches taken to deal with their possible nuclear ambitions diverged substantially. In response to the North Korean nuclear program, the United States sent the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to Pyongyang to pursue diplomatic engagement and offer benefits in exchange for reductions, while simultaneously attempting to pass a resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq in Congress.

Following the exposure of North Korea's secret nuclear program to develop enriched uranium weapons, the Bush administration persisted in using diplomacy and negotiation to solve the conflict, sending numerous diplomats to confer with "friends and allies" (Howard, 2004). Moreover, in spite of Iraq's inability at that time to produce enough weapons-grade material to make a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States still pursued harsher measures, which included the use of force. Despite North Korea having already demonstrated its greater nuclear and military capability, which included its capacity to produce dozens of nuclear bombs, American policy continued to favor diplomacy with Pyongyang and war with Baghdad.

Peter Howard asserts that neither realism nor norm-focused constructivism can fully account for this divergence since both would predict the more threatening state to attract a more forceful balancing response (Howard, 2004). He instead emphasizes a language-based constructivist approach that epitomizes how entrenched diplomatic practices function as a game of negotiation, which limits the perceived many of responses and renders large-scale military action against North Korea unthinkable (Howard, 2004). He delineated that compared to Iraq, the exceeding nuclear capabilities of North Korea in 2002 gave it a more prominent aptitude to

threaten American allies. He attributes the varying responses to be residual anomalies of the different narratives and practices by which the two relationships were associated (Howard, 2004). Howard asserts that American relationships with Iraq were long associated with long-standing patterns of confrontation and imposition, which dated back to the 1991 Gulf War, in which Iraq had already been perceived as an accordant target for military operations (Howard, 2004). Conversely, North Korea was met with diplomacy on account of routine interactions centered on crisis management and bargaining. Taken together, material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses. Instead, outcomes are dependent upon previous and current “language-games” that continue to influence and structure interaction. More generally speaking, the political implications of a “rogue state” are mediated by diplomatic practice and discussion, rather than being solely determined by capability and peril (Howard, 2004).

Another plausible explanation would be Carl Schmitt’s assertion, in which he treats the “rogue state” label as a friend-enemy marker to explain why responses to states can be inconsistent. Schmitt contends that rather than acting as a neutral reflection of an enemy’s objective capability, the designation of a “rogue state” is often a tool used by dominant states to legitimize their own actions against an enemy (Howard, 2004). On that account, the United States may label states as “rogue” in order to justify intervention based on alleged dangers to the international community.

Furthermore, Gordy and Lee (2009) contend that Cuba and North Korea are deemed as “rogue specters” because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms are perceived as dangerous (Gordy & Lee, 2009). From this perspective, states are treated as threats due to their refusal to adopt a dominant free market and liberal narratives. This blatant

refusal thereby complicates the American claims to universality and progress (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Hence, the very essence of North Korea and Cuba is very much rooted in being “specters” that challenge the supposed inevitability of global progress headed by the United States. Scholars, therefore, view American responses to rogue states as attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity.

Because Cuba and North Korea typically do not submit to American values, they are constructed as enemies in the eyes of America and therefore warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation. Due to their continued survival being validation for the existence of alternative identities, the American universalist claims and rhetoric are defied and unsettled. Litwak asserts that from that point on, labeling a state as “rogue,” American policy strives to legitimize intervention and fortify American dominance, rather than impartially describing a type of regime. He illustrates the United States reacting more vehemently to states that denounce their moral authority in part because their existence and defiance not only threaten American security, but also its authority on the world stage. The constant depiction of Cuba and North Korea as “rogue” is therefore read as highlighting the political nature of the threat they pose, which fundamentally challenges the universalist claim of the U.S.-led order (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Thus American responses to “rogue states” were never against isolated transgressions, but a reaction to the alternative identities that have the potential to prompt re-evaluation of American dominance. The literature ultimately stresses that an intrinsic understanding of varying American foreign policy decisions necessitates gauging the ideological narratives of each regime beyond their material capacity.

The Rogue State Label Beyond the United States

While the United States has used the "rogue state" label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term – they often prefer legal and treaty based terms. Routinely, American attempts to normalize the rogue state term are met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a "rogue state" may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America's closest allies remained reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles, the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning both the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). While many American allies may have endorsed the principles of nonproliferation, they still frequently resisted the American strategies of intervention, especially when they lacked international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal "rogue state" (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were then reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called "rogue states" did not behave in ways that were fundamentally different from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998). In fact, American efforts to isolate "rogue states" were persistently undercut by the interests and foreign policy of other major powers.

Many scholars, including Christopher Bluth, argue that American efforts to isolate “rogue states” have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). The discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like Russia and China; rather they reflect a wider reluctance among various states to align with American terminology. Not only is this absence of consensus evident in practice, but also in much literature, where the term is believed to be analytically indeterminate. The label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” was met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). For instance, Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the rogue state label, the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials hinted at the disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. Stuard Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America’s sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and governments. The European Union, during debates over Iran, resisted American pressures and chose to

prioritize dialogue and economic ties to shape Iranian behavior (Saunders, 2006). The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives.

Decline and Transformation of Rogue State Rhetoric

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to better justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald Reagan, for instance, helped mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (Litwak, 2001). This form of persuasion capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which thereby made harsh measures seem appropriate and necessary. Yet, many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, the implications extend beyond limited American capability to generate high political costs and strained relations among allies (Litwak, 2001).

As pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both of them demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling

to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

Simultaneously, research began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes, which further challenged the American notion that they constituted a distinct category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, rogue states were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted rogue states thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives. This research ultimately drew attention to the notion that the labels’ primary function was ideological and rhetorical, and intended to draw attention to enemies of the U.S.-led liberal order, rather than as a definition for a stable, objective category in international relations.

Conclusion

Across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to rogue states is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain

heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the labels validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a rogue state, the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an uncodified-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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Review of Submission 100140, "*Why is There Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States?*"

Overall, the paper is well written and contributes to the knowledge of rogue states. Throughout the paper, the ambiguity and vagueness of the term have been properly argued. The author has demonstrated a good understanding of the literature on the term 'rogue states' and how the label affects the treatment of such states, particularly by the United States. In analysing the term, I would encourage the author to consult some of the literature that has looked at 'failed states.' Some of the arguments presented by the author on rogue states are akin to those that have been made on 'failed states.' I highly recommend the author to consult: *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* by Sarah Woodward. She makes interesting points which I think will help strengthen the author's argument. Although the argument is sound, several major corrections are needed before the paper can be accepted for publication.

1. The introduction analyses the concept of rogue states. While this is commendable, the introduction lacks clarity on the direction which the paper is taking. As such, I encourage the author to introduce the main concepts that will be discussed in the paper and the order in which these will be argued. I suggest adding a paragraph containing something like this: This paper argues This paper is organised as follows... This will help the reader know what to expect and where this argument is going.
2. Although the paper seeks to examine the variation in global responses to rogue states, a substantial portion of it has dwelt on the contested nature of the term "rogue states". I was left wondering whether the paper was critiquing the term "rogue state" rather than the responses these states have received.
3. The choice of case studies is great because the states in question have been labelled rogue. Coupled with the critique of the term, these case studies would drive the argument that indeed there are varied responses to these states. However, I think the structure of analysing these has been a bit muddled. I suggest that, instead of mixing them up, it would be better to clearly label these 'rogue' states and address each in detail. This would help ensure the argument is clear about how these states have been treated differently. I would have loved the author to interrogate in detail how the material, vis-à-vis the military capacity of the said rogue states, also plays a part in determining the response such a state receives.
4. The paper would benefit from a language editor. Some sentences are quite long, making it difficult to fully understand the argument. Coupled with this, I would also encourage the author to revisit in-text citations – I have highlighted some of these.

Final Recommendation

Accept with **major** revisions (acceptance conditional on satisfactory major revisions)

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[REDACTED]

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Another plausible explanation would be Carl Schmitt’s assertion, in which he treats the “rogue state” label as a friend-enemy marker to explain why responses to states can be inconsistent. Schmitt contends that rather than acting as a neutral reflection of an enemy's objective capability, the designation of a “rogue state” is often a tool used by dominant states to legitimize their own actions against an enemy (Howard, 2004). On that account, the United States may label states as “rogue” in order to justify intervention based on alleged dangers to the international community.

Furthermore, Gordy and Lee (2009) contend that Cuba and North Korea are deemed as “rogue specters” because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms are perceived as dangerous (Gordy & Lee, 2009). From this perspective, states are treated as threats due to their refusal to adopt a dominant free market and liberal narratives. This blatant

refusal thereby complicates the American claims to universality and progress (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Hence, the very essence of North Korea and Cuba is very much rooted in being “specters” that challenge the supposed inevitability of global progress headed by the United States. Scholars, therefore, view American responses to rogue states as attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity.

Because Cuba and North Korea typically do not submit to American values, they are constructed as enemies in the eyes of America and therefore warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation. Due to their continued survival being validation for the existence of alternative identities, the American universalist claims and rhetoric are defied and unsettled. Litwak asserts that from that point on, labeling a state as “rogue,” American policy strives to legitimize intervention and fortify American dominance, rather than impartially describing a type of regime. He illustrates the United States reacting more vehemently to states that denounce their moral authority in part because their existence and defiance not only threaten American security, but also its authority on the world stage. The constant depiction of Cuba and North Korea as “rogue” is therefore read as highlighting the political nature of the threat they pose, which fundamentally challenges the universalist claim of the U.S.-led order (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Thus American responses to “rogue states” were never against isolated transgressions, but a reaction to the alternative identities that have the potential to prompt re-evaluation of American dominance. The literature ultimately stresses that an intrinsic understanding of varying American foreign policy decisions necessitates gauging the ideological narratives of each regime beyond their material capacity.

The Rogue State Label Beyond the United States

While the United States has used the "rogue state" label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term – they often prefer legal and treaty based terms. Routinely, American attempts to normalize the rogue state term are met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a "rogue state" may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America's closest allies remained reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles, the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning both the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). While many American allies may have endorsed the principles of nonproliferation, they still frequently resisted the American strategies of intervention, especially when they lacked international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal "rogue state" (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were then reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called "rogue states" did not behave in ways that were fundamentally different from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998). In fact, American efforts to isolate "rogue states" were persistently undercut by the interests and foreign policy of other major powers.

Many scholars, including Christopher Bluth, argue that American efforts to isolate “rogue states” have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). The discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like Russia and China; rather they reflect a wider reluctance among various states to align with American terminology. Not only is this absence of consensus evident in practice, but also in much literature, where the term is believed to be analytically indeterminate. The label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” was met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). For instance, Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the rogue state label, the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials hinted at the disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. Stuard Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America’s sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and governments. The European Union, during debates over Iran, resisted American pressures and chose to

prioritize dialogue and economic ties to shape Iranian behavior (Saunders, 2006). The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives.

Decline and Transformation of Rogue State Rhetoric

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to better justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald Reagan, for instance, helped mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (Litwak, 2001). This form of persuasion capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which thereby made harsh measures seem appropriate and necessary. Yet, many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, the implications extend beyond limited American capability to generate high political costs and strained relations among allies (Litwak, 2001).

As pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both of them demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling

to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

Simultaneously, research began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes, which further challenged the American notion that they constituted a distinct category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, rogue states were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted rogue states thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives. This research ultimately drew attention to the notion that the labels’ primary function was ideological and rhetorical, and intended to draw attention to enemies of the U.S.-led liberal order, rather than as a definition for a stable, objective category in international relations.

Conclusion

Across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to rogue states is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain

heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the labels validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a rogue state, the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an uncodified-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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Review for article “Why is There Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States?”

This literature review tackles a timely and conceptually rich question: why global responses to so-called “rogue states” vary despite apparent similarities in behaviour. The paper’s strongest contribution is its recognition that “rogue state” is not a neutral analytical category but a politically loaded label shaped by American foreign policy discourse. The author demonstrates good engagement with key scholarship (especially Caprioli & Trumbore, Litwak, Homolar, Howard, Gordy & Lee) and makes a persuasive case that the label functions rhetorically to justify selective intervention, isolation, and security framing. The discussion of post-Cold War US security strategy is particularly effective, and the paper shows a strong awareness of how threat perception is socially constructed rather than purely determined by material capabilities.

That said, the paper would benefit significantly from clearer structure and sharper analytical signposting. At present, the review gestures toward multiple explanations (constructivist language-games, ideological identity threats, realist considerations, allied divergence) but does not fully integrate them into a single structured synthesis. This single synthesis should be made a part of your introduction and conclusion.

In terms of originality, the paper has a strong foundation.

Overall, this is a strong and promising literature review that demonstrates good engagement with relevant debates and offers a convincing critique of the rogue state label as politically contingent. With restructuring and stronger synthesis, it could become a good piece that not only summarises scholarship but also clearly maps the intellectual terrain and shows what explains variation in state responses.

Below is some focused advice on where I would recommend changes, and what you may need to do to get this to the finish line of publishing.

Abstract:

The abstract needs to be rewritten. It is more of an introduction than a summary of what the paper’s thesis. It should clearly lay out the answer to your question and a summary of how you arrived at that answer.

Title:

I recommend changing it from a question to a statement.

The title promises an explanation of “global responses,” but the review is still overwhelmingly US-centric; while the later section on European reluctance is useful, the paper could strengthen its global framing by more directly addressing how other major powers (e.g., China, Russia, or non-Western institutions) contest or reinterpret the rogue-state label. This may be too much to do, so instead, the wording “global” can be changed or toned down a bit.

Introduction:

Establish in the introduction first that the definition of rogue state is unclear and contested in the practice and theory of IR. Then tell us why this is a problem to research (this is your contribution and main research question). I know you go into this in the next section, so this needs to be done briefly, and you can write in the introduction that your first section of the paper tackled the issue of ambiguity.

In the intro, please consider adding a small paragraph that tells the reader how your paper supports your thesis/answer. This is what we call signposting, so the reader knows the main components of your argument.

Citation practice improvements:

You used the terms “most scholars” and “some scholars” a lot. In these places, you need to cite/footnote these scholars. One more example of this oversight: “Existing research frequently notes that the emergence of the label coincided with the U.S. State Department’s first publication of an annual list of states that sponsored terrorism. Scholars believe their publication to be among the first to contribute to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and dangerous.”- What scholars and what existing research?

Similarly, on page 2: “The fears and concerns of many analysts were further intensified and amplified...” which analysts? You mention Sec of State Baker in the next sentence, but he is not an analyst. So you need to be very clear on some of these vague people/analysts/researchers you keep referring to. More generally, across the paper, you make claims that are unsupported by a reference. There are claims that are not validated with scholarship. Like when you said “in the absence of codified criteria”, you haven’t told us that there why there is an absence, and who (what scholars) say that it is absent. Similarly on page 3: “Three recurring ideas are frequently associated with “rogue state” status: facilitation or sponsorship of terrorism, illicit acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and opposition to dominant power and ideologies.” Here you are attaching to the label some characteristics and need to reference literature that associates these things with rogue state status.

Another example pg4: “American policy, in the years following, subsisted in treating “rogue states” as the epicenter of threat, even as the criteria for what constituted a rogue state remained vague and extensively contested within academia.”- this needs a citation

Please go through your paper to catch any text that makes a claim without substantiating it with academic literature or empirical data/example (which also need a citation).

There are also places where you mention a writer but then don’t give a citation in text—for example, Robert Litwak on page 2.

On the Iraq–North Korea comparison:

The Iraq–North Korea comparison is an excellent case study, but the paper could strengthen its analytical payoff by explicitly stating what this comparison demonstrates: that responses are shaped less by objective threat and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies.

On Carl Schmitt

Similarly, the discussion of Carl Schmitt and the “friend–enemy” distinction is promising, but the paper should clarify whether this is being presented as a theoretical framework that resolves the puzzle, or merely as an interpretive supplement. The use of Schmitt seems to be through the Howard, 2004, paper, and there is some misreading about what Schmitt says about rogue states. Carl Schmitt did not use the specific, modern term "rogue states" (which gained prominence after 9/11), but his political theory directly addresses the conceptual foundation of this idea i.e., the criminalisation of the enemy and the distinction between legitimate states and outlaws. You need to engage with his work directly, or just focus on Howard’s case and example.

Structure of the essay:

Your title asks: Why is there variation in global responses?

But for the first half of the essay, you are mostly explaining:

- What a rogue state is
- Where the term came from
- How the US used it

That is necessary groundwork — but structurally, you need earlier signalling like:

This ambiguity becomes central to explaining variation in responses.

Otherwise, it reads like a concept history rather than a response-variation puzzle.

The section on:

- Reagan
- Expansion of the category
- Decline in usage
- Libya case

Is structurally good material but its placement creates slight drift.

Why?

Because after widening to global responses, you then go back into US rhetorical evolution again.

It feels like:

- US
- Global
- US again

That weakens the structural arc.

Your essay has the right components:

- Conceptual origins of “rogue state”
- US policy development
- Iraq vs North Korea case contrast
- Constructivist explanation
- Schmitt theoretical extension
- Global/non-US divergence
- Decline of the label
- Conclusion

The problem is not content. The problem is organisation and argumentative signalling.

Right now it reads as:

Concept history → US policy → Example → Theory → More theory → Non-US → More examples → Conclusion

What it should feel like is:

Puzzle → Concept problem → Explanatory camps → Empirical illustration → Broader variation → Synthesis

You have the pieces. They just need stronger structural logic. I found this to be the biggest issue while reading the piece. In revisions, I would recommend inserting a roadmap paragraph at the end of the introduction:

Something like:

This review proceeds in three parts. First, it examines scholarship tracing the historical emergence and expansion of the rogue state label. Second, it evaluates competing explanations for policy variation, including materialist and constructivist accounts. Third, it considers how global actors beyond the United States respond differently to the label. This alone would dramatically improve structure.

Slightly reposition the “decline of the label” material. It would sit better either:

- Immediately after the historical expansion section, OR
- Folded into the conclusion as part of your synthesis.

If you have time, optionally, a key opportunity would be to explicitly organise the literature into competing explanatory categories—for example: (1) materialist explanations (threat/capability), (2) constructivist explanations (identity and discourse), (3) institutional/diplomatic practice explanations (path dependency and precedent), and (4) geopolitical-interest explanations (alliance politics and strategic selectivity). This would make the paper feel less like a chronological overview and more like a conceptually organised review that guides the reader through scholarly debates.

Writing:

Stylistically, the writing is mostly clear and professional, but there are occasional issues with repetition, overly long sentences, and vague phrasing (e.g., “mass traction,” “subsisted in treating,” “exceeding nuclear capabilities”). These do not undermine the argument but do reduce readability. The paper would also benefit from more explicit topic sentences at the beginning of each section and clearer transitions between paragraphs. Finally, citations are generally used appropriately, but the paper occasionally makes broad claims (for example, about allies’ motivations or the “ineffectiveness” of sanctions) that would require either tighter phrasing or clearer attribution to specific authors.

Remove apostrophe mistakes: labels validity → label’s validity

Fix spelling errors: Regean → Reagan, Stuard → Stuart

Ensure consistent quotation marks around “rogue state”

On page 8: “Because Cuba and North Korea typically do not submit to American values, they are constructed as enemies in the eyes of America and therefore warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation.”- submit to American values, is vague. Make the difference more specific and focus on their differing political positions.

Final Recommendation

- Accept with minor revisions (acceptance conditional on satisfactory **major** revisions)

While the revisions are not that focused on content, rather structure and grammar/citation, this could have been recommended with minor revisions. However, as some of the argumentation (like the Carl Schmitt section) needs consideration, I feel it falls into the major revision category, even as the changes may seem minor.

Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States

[Author name redacted]

February 1, 2026

Abstract

Rogue states have been a contentious topic among scholars, yet in their simplest form, they can be defined as aggressive states or governments that aim to disrupt the balance of power by acquiring weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring international terrorism. At the same time, the term's ambiguity and lack of objectivity have been at the forefront of scholarship and debate, with many scholars —namely Caprioli and Trumbore— noting the lack of consistent criteria and inconsistent usage of the term. Hence, both the significance and analytical utility of the label have faced much scrutiny and criticism, especially as scholars contend that “rogue states” are unusually aggressive or prone to conflict is untrue; empirical evidence suggests that the behavior of alleged “rogue states” does not systemically differ from that of other states (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). In this sense, when considering the “Rogue State” label's origins in U.S. foreign policy, the term, rather than as a neutral reflection of objective threat, serves to construct certain “norm-violating” states as villains to mobilize preemptive, politicized measures (Homolar, 2011). Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between conflicting narratives, which support the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.

Introduction

The term “rogue state” is far from an objective analytical category; rather, it is a political construct historically embedded within the discourse and ideology of American foreign policy. Robert Litwak traces the term’s emergence to the post-Cold War era, when the Pentagon sought a quest for a new post-Cold War mission that would redefine threats after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Litwak, 2001). In the face of policymakers and media outlets routinely using the term to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Amidst this debate the label “rogue state” is best understood as a shifting, unilateral American political concept without a foundation in international law (Buchwald, 2019). In fact, the term “rogue state” is a profoundly unsettled concept in international law. Different governments habitually have had divergent perspectives on what constitutes a “rogue state,” and which states meet the criteria (Buchwald, 2019). Commonly cited “rogue states” include North Korea, Iran, Cuba, and Libya; Libya is no longer classified as a “rogue state” (Schwartz, 2007; *The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense* on JSTOR, n.d.) Thus, in the absence of a codified set of criteria for what a “rogue state” is, the label is a rhetorical tool to legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions, rather than a precise scholarly concept.

This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This conflation renders it impossible to know which “rogue” states are truly “rogue” and that fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion. Moreover, considering recent empirical evidence, the notion that so-called “rogue

states” are uniquely deviant is inconsistent with the evidence, which only further diminishes the analytical utility of the term (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The U.S. State Department’s first publication of the annual list of states that sponsored terrorism contributed to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and threatening (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Existing research frequently notes three recurring ideas that arose from the publication: facilitation of terrorism, illicit weapons of mass destruction (WMD) acquisition, and opposition to dominant power and ideologies (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Likewise, early commentary in the Washington Post Editorial on Libya’s sponsorship of terrorism repeatedly emphasized Qaddafi’s sponsorship of terrorism as the locus of Libya’s threat. This marked state-led terrorism as a unique, distinct behavior. Such continuous framing of Libya’s state-sponsored terrorism set a precedent that facilitation of terrorism was a central indicator of “rogue” statehood in American discourse (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Therefore, the United States was allowed to invoke numerous tools —military strikes, unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, criminal prosecutions —to “change” Libya’s dangerous behavior (Schwartz, 2007).

Over time, the label expanded to encompass states seeking WMD and missile delivery systems, which anchored WMD proliferation as a key marker of a “rogue” statehood. Litwak, among other scholars, examined the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy and missile-defense debates, and concluded that “rogue states armed with WMD” were framed as the main post-Cold War threat (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption | Wilson Center, 2011). Thus, in the immediate post-Cold War period, academic analysts portrayed isolated regimes as potential proliferators, which reinforced the link between isolation, terrorism, and WMD acquisition.

These fears and concerns of “rogue state” proliferation and aggression were then intensified and amplified when American officials explicitly identified certain regimes as central threats to national security. For instance, former Secretary of State James Baker, during his 1989 Senate remarks, stressed the dangers posed by ballistic missiles and chemical warheads that had fallen into the hands of aggressive, terrorism supporting governments (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). As a result, the supposed threat of “rogue states” drove U.S. foreign policy and was used as important justification in numerous policy decisions. Analysis on U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force were justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002). This logic was consistent with the many arguments for maintaining high defense spending and advanced weapons systems. Senator John Tower, for example, justified the continual investment in the B-2 stealth bomber by referencing certain “rogue regimes” having acquired sophisticated air defenses and state-of-the-art weapons (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Building on this, he claimed that the B-2 stealth bomber was crucial to countering the unpredictable nature of “rogue states.” At the close of the 20th century, these attributes, although never fully agreed upon, became de-facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states.

Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It first argues the term “rogue state” is ambiguously and politically constructed, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Second, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major

powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the “rogue state” label. Finally, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses vary.

Politicization and Ambiguity of the Rogue State Label

The term “rogue state” became ubiquitous in U.S. policy discourse during the Clinton Administration and was continued during the Bush Administration. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, George W. Bush, identified so-called rogue states as the “gravest” threat to American national security, labeling North Korea, Iraq, and Iran major threats requiring preemptive and anticipatory action (Homolar, 2011). Concurrently, scholars such as Litwak emphasized that the term originated as a unilateral American political tool that functioned primarily as a changing U.S. foreign policy lexicon (Litwak, 2001). Within this context, due to the label growing out of American rhetoric instead of a multilateral framework, its meaning remained extremely fluid and dependent upon American rhetorical needs.

The 2002 National Security Strategy marked a broader shift in American policy from a containment approach to one that legitimated unilateral military intervention and structured policy as more assertive and proactive towards states deemed “rogue.” In the aftermath of this shift, arms controls and nonproliferation documents repeatedly stressed efforts to prevent the leakage of WMD materials and missile technologies to “rogue” regimes, casting them as the primary proliferation concern (O’Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, subsequent missile defense and military initiatives were likewise justified as the necessary course of action to sustain restrictions on rogue state weapons development and deployment (O’Reilly, 2007). Yet this agenda was entirely reliant on a term whose attributes remained ill-defined; U.S. officials, in the years following, treated “rogue states” as the epicenter of threat amid extensive debate and opposition.

Nevertheless, many analysts assert that the term functioned to fill a conceptual gap in American security strategy and remained skeptical that the regimes identified as rogue truly constituted a coherent category. When observing states such as North Korea and Cuba, scholars suggested the dangers they posed were exaggerated into hyperbolic, alarmist terms (Gordy & Lee, 2009). In this sense, the “rogue state” rubric became a tool for controlling narratives and further legitimizing unilateral American policy initiatives and interests (Gordy & Lee, 2009). These analyses exemplify that this rhetoric underwrote the foundation for a broad array of policy decisions. Without transparent criteria, the politically charged attributes of the label revealed an overall lack of precision and objectivity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The Rogue State Label in Practice

Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was among those who argued that the United States possessed the responsibility to neutralize, contain, and develop so-called “rogue states” into more constructive members of the international community (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, this way of thinking settled into American discourse, creating a strategic mechanism for the way North Korea and Iraq were treated in U.S. policy. Both countries were portrayed as dangerous outliers whose ambitions and defiance necessitated unique, targeted measures. Yet the stark contrast between war with Iraq and diplomacy in North Korea served as evidence that the “rogue state” rubric rarely reflected material threat, as regimes labeled in a similar appellation prompted notably different policy responses. This contrast demonstrates another example that the “rogue state” label failed to generate consistent, uniform policy responses; rather, responses are channeled through historical narratives, language-games, and friend-enemy distinctions that render a “rogue” as manageable through either diplomacy or military action.

In response to the North Korean nuclear program, the United States dispatched the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to Pyongyang to pursue diplomatic engagement and offer benefits in exchange for reductions, even as it sought authorization to use military force against Iraq. Even after North Korea's secret nuclear program to develop enriched uranium weapons was exposed, the Bush administration persisted with diplomacy and negotiation to resolve the conflict, sending numerous diplomats to confer with "friends and allies" (Howard, 2004). Such language demonstrates the U.S. intention to handle the DPRK problem multilaterally. By contrast, despite Iraq's inability at that time to produce enough weapons-grade material to make a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States still pursued harsher unilateral measures that culminated in war (Howard, 2004). It is important to note that North Korea, at this time, had already demonstrated its greater nuclear and military capability, which included its capacity to produce dozens of nuclear bombs (Nikitin, n.d.). Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic "language-games," and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.

Peter Howard asserts that neither realism nor norm-focused constructivism can fully account for this divergence since both would predict the more threatening state to attract a more forceful balancing response (Howard, 2004). He instead emphasizes a language-based constructivist approach that epitomizes how entrenched diplomatic practices function as a game of negotiation, which limits the perceived many of responses and renders large-scale military action against North Korea unthinkable (Howard, 2004). Although North Korea's nuclear capabilities in 2002 were more prominent than Iraq, Howard delineates that the varying

responses was due to the different narratives and institutional habits that had accumulated in each relationship. (Howard, 2004). U.S. dealings with Iraq were long associated with long-standing patterns of confrontation and imposition dating back to the 1991 Gulf War, so Iraq had already been constructed as an appropriate target for military operations (Howard, 2004). Conversely, North Korea was met with diplomacy on account of routine interactions centered on crisis management and bargaining that was embedded in cooperative frameworks (Howard, 2004). Taken together, these dynamics illustrate a distinct constructivist perspective: material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses; they are dependent upon previous and current “language-games” and institutional precedents that tell decision-makers what responses are legitimate and within the scope of imaginable. More generally, the political implications of a “rogue state” are mediated by diplomatic practice and discussion, rather than being solely determined by capability and peril (Howard, 2004).

Another theoretical framework that helps interpret these dynamics is Carl Schmitt’s concept of the friend-enemy distinction. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term “rogue state,” his political theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the label to explain the criminalization of certain enemies and the drawing of a boundary between “normal” members and outlaw states that can be treated as exceptions. For Schmitt, the boundary lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. He contends that once an actor is viewed as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance.

Through his perspective, the term “rogue state” functions less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that legitimizes unprecedented behavior. Rather

than a reflection of an enemy's objective capability, the designation of a “rogue state” allows dominant states to depict certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts against an enemy (Howard, 2004). Moreover, calling a state “rogue” helps reframe a regular adversary into an outlaw in which certain actions can be presented as necessary and justified. However, this framework does not resolve the Iraq-North Korea puzzle on its own, but it better conceptualizes how the politics of naming and criminalization influence which adversaries are “ultimate enemies” and which are negotiable.

Gordy and Lee (2009) extend this line of reasoning and contend that Cuba and North Korea are deemed as “rogue” because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms is perceived as dangerous to the international community, or more specifically the U.S. (Gordy & Lee, 2009). From this perspective, states are treated as threats because of their refusal to adopt a dominant free market or liberal narrative, which thereby complicates the U.S. claims to universality and progress (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Thus, North Korea and Cuba are “specters” that challenge the supposed inevitability of global progress headed by the United States (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Because of their refusal to submit to American values, Cuba and North Korea are constructed as enemies that warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation in the eyes of America. Because their continued survival validates the existence of alternative identities, U.S. universalist claims and rhetoric are defied and unsettled. From that point on, labeling a state as “rogue,” American policy strives to legitimize intervention and fortify American dominance. So, the United States reacting more vehemently to certain is because their existence and defiance not only threaten American security, but its global authority. Therefore, the constant depiction of Cuba and North Korea as “rogue” highlights the political nature of the threat they pose, which fundamentally challenges the universalist claim of

the U.S.-led order (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Therefore, American responses to rogue states are attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity (Klare, 1995).

Beyond the United States

While the United States used the "rogue state" label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term— they often prefer legal and treaty-based terms. Routinely, American attempts to push the “rogue state” rubric is met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries to the United States, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold that has been agreed upon. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a “rogue state” may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America’s closest allies historically have been reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles, the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Even if many American allies endorse the nonproliferation in principle, they still frequently resist the American strategies of intervention, especially when they lack international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal “rogue state” (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were subsequently reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called “rogue states” did not behave in ways that were fundamentally divergent from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998).

Christopher Bluth argues that American efforts to isolate “rogue states” have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). Chinese companies have even assisted Pyongyang in bypassing international scrutiny and allowing the regime to secure funding and technologies related to its nuclear and missile initiatives (China’s Facilitation of Sanctions and Export Control Evasion, n.d.). The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). For instance, both Russia and China have used their Security Council veto power to block and lessen penalties against North Korean sanctions violations (Cha & Kim, 2024). However, the discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like Russia and China; rather they reflect the wider reluctance to align with American terminology. In much literature, the term is analytically indeterminate, and the label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” was met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the “rogue state label”, the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials even hinted at this disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. Stuart Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America’s sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a

coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and governments. The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives.

Conclusion

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to help justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald Reagan, for instance, helped mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (Litwak, 2001). This capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which made harsh measures seem more appropriate and necessary. Yet many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, as pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for

under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

At the same time, research also began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes. This further challenged the American notion that “rogue states” constituted a distinct category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, “rogue states” were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted “rogue states” thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives.

Thus, across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to “rogue states” is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the label’s validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a “rogue state”, the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an ambiguous uncodified-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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~~Why is There Variation in Global~~ **Global** Responses to Rogue States?

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Abstract

Rogue states have been a contentious topic among scholars, yet in their simplest form, they can be defined as aggressive states or governments that aim to disrupt the balance of power by acquiring weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring international terrorism. ~~The notion of a rogue state has been a heavily disputed topic among scholars, with~~ At the same time, ~~both~~ the term's ambiguity and lack of objectivity have been at the forefront of scholarship and debate, with many scholars —namely Caprioli and Trumbore— noting the lack of consistent criteria and inconsistent usage of the term. Hence, ~~both~~ ~~its~~ the significance and analytical utility of the label have faced much scrutiny and criticism, especially as scholars contend that “rogue states” are unusually aggressive or prone to conflict is untrue; empirical evidence suggests that the behavior of alleged “rogue states” does not systemically differ from that of other states (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). In this sense, when considering the “Rogue State” label's origins in U.S. foreign policy, the term, rather than as a neutral reflection of objective threat, serves to construct certain “norm-violating” states as villains to mobilize preemptive, politicized measures (Homolar, 2011). Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between conflicting narratives, which support the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself. ~~meaning and analytical utility being at the mercy of much scrutiny and criticism.~~ While some scholars speculate on the emergence of the term, others criticize the term's ~~ambiguity and lack of objectivity.~~ This review seeks to analyze existing literature on diverging

~~responses to rogue states to explain why some states labeled as rogue face sanctions and scrutiny, while other arguably similar regimes are largely overlooked. Rather than viewing the term “rogue state” as a definitive label by which uniform policy decisions may be attached, this review will focus on the role political and ideological commitments play in determining which actors are problematized and which are overlooked. This review charts how a wide spectrum of responses is implicated when considering diverging rhetoric, interests, and commitments.~~

Introduction

~~Most scholars would agree that the term~~The term “rogue state” is far from an objective analytical category; rather, it is ~~instead arguing that the term is~~ a political construct historically embedded within the discourse and ideology of American foreign policy. ~~Many academics, including Robert Litwak, traces~~ the term’s emergence to the post-Cold War era, specifically ~~when~~ the Pentagon ~~’s~~sought a quest for a new post-Cold War mission that would ~~help~~ redefine threats after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Litwak, 2001). ~~In the face of policymakers and media outlets routinely using the term to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Amidst this debate the label~~ The term “rogue state” is best understood as a shifting, unilateral American political concept without a foundation in international law (Buchwald, 2019)~~less as a definitive, widely accepted label and more as a highly debated, flexible, continually shifting rubric. In fact, the term “rogue state” is a profoundly unsettled concept in international law. Different governments~~

habitually have had divergent perspectives on what constitutes a “rogue state,” and which states meet the criteria (Buchwald, 2019). Commonly cited “rogue states” include North Korea, Iran, Cuba, and Libya; Libya is no longer classified as a “rogue state” (Schwartz, 2007; The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense on JSTOR, n.d.) Thus, ~~in the absence of a codified set of set of criteria for what constitutes a “rogue state;” is, the label is a rhetorical tool to legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions, rather than a precise scholarly concept. acts not as a scholarly concept, but as a rhetorical tool believed by scholars to help legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions. While policymakers and media outlets routinely use the term “rogue state” to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).~~

This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This conflation renders it impossible to know which “rogue” states are truly “rogue” and that fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion. Moreover, considering recent empirical evidence, the notion that so-called “rogue states” are uniquely deviant is inconsistent with the evidence, which only further diminishes the analytical utility of the term (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The U.S. State Department’s first publication of the annual list of states that sponsored terrorism contributed to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and threatening (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). ~~Existing Existing research frequently notes that the emergence of the label coincided with the U.S. State Department’s first publication of an annual list of states that sponsored terrorism. Scholars believe their publication to be among the first to contribute to~~

~~the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and dangerous. (Three recurring ideas that arose from the publication: are frequently associated with “rogue state” status: facilitation or sponsorship of terrorism, illicit acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) acquisition, and opposition to dominant power and ideologies (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).) Likewise, e~~Early commentary in the Washington Post Editorial on Libya’s sponsorship of terrorism repeatedly emphasized Qaddafi’s sponsorship of terrorism as the locus of Libya’s threat. This marked state-led terrorism as a unique, distinct behavior. Such continuous framing of Libya’s state-sponsored terrorism set a precedent that ~~in the late 1970s and 1980s set a precedent for the anchoring of facilitation of terrorism as~~ was a central indicator of “rogue” statehood in American discourse (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). ~~Therefore, the United States was allowed to invoke numerous tools —military strikes, unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, criminal prosecutions —to “change” Libya’s dangerous behavior (Schwartz, 2007). -~~

~~Over time~~Over time, the label expanded to encompass states seeking WMD and missile delivery systems, which ~~recast~~ anchored WMD proliferation as a key marker of a “rogue” statehood. Litwak, among other scholars, examined the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy and missile-defense debates, and concluded that “rogue states armed with WMD” were framed as the main post-Cold War threat (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption | Wilson Center, 2011). ~~state.” Hence~~Thus, in the immediate post-Cold War period, academic analysts ~~of WMD proliferation~~ portrayed isolated regimes as potential proliferators, which reinforced the link between isolation, terrorism, and WMD acquisition. ~~, even as the strength of this association remained subjective and debated.—~~

~~The~~These fears and concerns of “rogue state” proliferation and aggression of many ~~analysts~~ were then further intensified and amplified when American officials explicitly identified

certain regimes as central threats to national security. For instance, ~~former~~ Former Secretary of State James Baker, during his 1989 Senate remarks, stressed the dangers posed by ballistic missiles and chemical warheads that had fallen into the hands of aggressive, terrorism supporting governments (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). As a result, the supposed threat ~~that of~~ “rogue states” ~~posed became a key driving concept in~~ ~~drove American~~ U.S. foreign policy, ~~with the term being used as an~~ ~~and was used as~~ important justification ~~in~~ ~~in~~ numerous policy decisions. ~~Analysis on~~ U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force were justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002). This logic was consistent with the many arguments for maintaining high defense spending and advanced weapons systems. ~~Former~~ Senator John Tower, for example, justified the continual investment in the B-2 stealth bomber by referencing certain “rogue regimes” having acquired sophisticated air defenses and state-of-the-art weapons (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). ~~Building on this, he claimed that the B-2 stealth bomber was crucial to countering the unpredictable nature of “rogue states.” At the close of the 20th century, these attributes, although never fully agreed upon, became de-facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states. Even as these attributes of “rogue statehood” were never formally codified, or even universally agreed upon, they became de facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states at the close of the twentieth century.~~

Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It first argues the term “rogue state” is ambiguously and politically constructed, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Second, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as

Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the “rogue state” label. Finally, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses vary.

Politicization and Ambiguity of the Rogue State Label

The term “rogue state” ~~gained mass traction and became~~ ubiquitous in U.S. policy discourse ~~more widespread during the Clinton Administration~~ Administration and was continued during the Bush Administration. ~~and following the attacks of September 11, 2001, it went on to drive foreign policy decisions.~~ In the 2002 National Security Strategy, George W. Bush, ~~so-called rogue states were identified~~ so-called rogue states as the “gravest” threat to American national security, ~~labeling~~ (Homolar, 2011). States such as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran ~~were detailed as major threats that requiring would require~~ preemptive and anticipatory action (Homolar, 2011). Concurrently, scholars such as Litwak emphasized that the term originated as a unilateral American political tool that functioned primarily as a changing U.S. foreign policy lexicon (Litwak, 2001). Within this context, due to the label growing out of American rhetoric instead of a multilateral framework, its meaning remained extremely fluid and dependent upon American rhetorical needs.

The 2002 National Security Strategy ~~represented~~ marked the ~~a~~ broader shift of in American policy from a containment approach ~~to one to that legitimated~~ unilateral military intervention ~~and~~, which fundamentally structured policy ~~to be more as more~~ assertive and proactive ~~towards states deemed “rogue.”~~; In the aftermath of this shift, ~~especially regarding states deemed as “rogue.”~~ As a consequence, the preponderance of arms controls and nonproliferation documents ~~habitually repeatedly stressed~~ underscored efforts that ~~to would~~ prevent the leakage of WMD materials and missile technologies ~~into to “rogue” the hands of~~

rogue regimes, casting them as the primary proliferation concern (O'Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, successive-subsequent missile defense and military programs-initiatives were often-likewise viewed-justified as the necessary course of action to sustain restrictions on rogue state weapons development and deployment (O'Reilly, 2007). Yet this agenda was entirely reliant on a term whose attributes remained ill-defined; U.S. officials-American policy, in the years following, subsisted-in-treating-treated "rogue states" as the epicenter of threat amid extensive debate and opposition. , even as the criteria for what constituted a rogue state remained vague and extensively-contested-within-academia.

Nevertheless, many scholars-analysts assert that believed the term served-functioned-to-to fill a conceptual gap within-in American security strategy, and-strategy and remained skeptical that the regimes identified as rogue truly constituted a coherent category. When observing states such as North Korea and Cuba, scholars suggested the precariousness-dangers they posed was-were exaggerated into hyperbolic, alarmist terms (Gordy & Lee, 2009). In this sense, the "rogue state" rubric the-term became a tool for controlling narratives and further justifying-legitimizing unilateral American unilateral-policy initiatives and interests (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Such-These analyses demonstrate-exemplify that this rhetoric served-underwrote-as-the foundation for a broad array of policy decisions. , yet the establishment of a clear, objective set of criteria was-compromised-by-the-vague-and-selective-nature-of-the-label. Absent-Without clear-transparent criteria, the politically charged attributes of the label exemplified-revealed an overall lack of precision and objectivity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Rather-than-functioning-as-a-coherent-behavioral-repertoire, the label, bereft-of-standardized-and-transparent-mechanisms, drew-heavily-upon-American-strategic-preferences-and-interests.

The Rogue State Label in Practice-The United States and Rogue State Diplomacy ¶

Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was among ~~the many who believed~~ ~~the~~ ~~those who argued that the~~ United States possessed the ~~unique~~ responsibility to neutralize, contain, and develop ~~strategies to transform~~ so-called “rogue states” into more constructive members of the international community (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, this way of thinking settled into American discourse, ~~normalizing~~ ~~creating a strategic mechanism for the way~~ North Korea and Iraq were treated in U.S. policy. ~~the idea that certain regimes were uniquely dangerous and required distinctive policy approaches.~~ Both countries were portrayed as dangerous outliers whose ambitions and defiance necessitated unique, targeted measures. Yet the stark contrast between war with Iraq and diplomacy in North Korea served as evidence that—
 However, ~~subsequent policy decisions showed that so-called rogue regimes were handled in very different ways.~~ ¶

~~Scholars have often pointed to the sharp contrast between American approaches to Iraq and North Korea as evidence that the “rogue state” label~~ ~~rubric rarely reflected material threat, as regimes does not consistently reflect the level of threat, since regimes~~ labeled in a similar appellation prompted notably different policy responses. ~~This contrast demonstrates another example that the “rogue state” label failed to generate consistent, uniform policy responses; rather, responses are channeled through historical narratives, language-games, and friend-enemy distinctions that render a “rogue” as manageable through either diplomacy or military action.~~ -

~~For example, in 2002, George Bush declared that North Korea, Iraq, and Iran, all of which were classified as rogue states, were pursuing weapons of mass destruction (Kim & Hundt, 2011). Yet despite the arguably comparable claims about their proliferation risks, the approaches taken to deal with their possible nuclear ambitions diverged substantially.~~ In response

to the North Korean nuclear program, the United States ~~sent~~ dispatched the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to Pyongyang to pursue diplomatic engagement and offer benefits in exchange for reductions, ~~even as it sought authorization to use military force against Iraq. Even after~~, while simultaneously attempting to pass a resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq in Congress. ¶

~~Following the exposure of~~ North Korea's secret nuclear program to develop enriched uranium weapons ~~was exposed~~, the Bush administration persisted ~~with in using~~ diplomacy and negotiation to ~~solve~~ resolve the conflict, ~~sending numerous diplomats to confer with "friends and allies"~~ (Howard, 2004). ~~Such language demonstrates the U.S. intention to handle the DPRK problem multilaterally. Moreover~~ By contrast, ~~in spite of~~ despite Iraq's inability at that time to produce enough weapons-grade material to make a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States still pursued harsher ~~unilateral~~ measures ~~that culminated in war, which included the use of force~~ (Howard, 2004). ~~Despite~~ It is important to note that North Korea, at this time, had already ~~having already~~ demonstrated its greater nuclear and military capability, which included its capacity to produce dozens of nuclear bombs (Nikitin, n.d.). ~~Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic "language-games," and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force. , American policy continued to favor diplomacy with Pyongyang and war with Baghdad.~~

Peter Howard asserts that neither realism nor norm-focused constructivism can fully account for this divergence since both would predict the more threatening state to attract a more forceful balancing response (Howard, 2004). He instead emphasizes a language-based

constructivist approach that epitomizes how entrenched diplomatic practices function as a game of negotiation, which limits the perceived many of responses and renders large-scale military action against North Korea unthinkable (Howard, 2004). Although North Korea's nuclear capabilities in 2002 were more prominent than Iraq, Howard delineates that the varying responses was due to the different narratives and institutional habits that had accumulated in each relationship. He delineated that compared to Iraq, the exceeding nuclear capabilities of North Korea in 2002 gave it a more prominent aptitude to threaten American allies. He attributes the varying responses to be residual anomalies of the different narratives and practices by which the two relationships were associated (Howard, 2004). U.S. Howard asserts that American relationships dealings with Iraq were long associated with long-standing patterns of confrontation and imposition dating back to the 1991 Gulf War, so Iraq had already been constructed as , which dated back to the 1991 Gulf War, in which Iraq had already been perceived as an accordant appropriate target for military operations (Howard, 2004). Conversely, North Korea was met with diplomacy on account of routine interactions centered on crisis management and bargaining. Taken bargaining that was embedded in cooperative frameworks (Howard, 2004). Taken together, these dynamics illustrate a distinct constructivist perspective: material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses; they are . Instead, outcomes are dependent upon previous and current "language-games" and institutional precedents that continue to influence and structure interaction tell decision-makers what responses are legitimate and within the scope of imaginable. More generally speaking, the political implications of a "rogue state" are mediated by diplomatic practice and discussion, rather than being solely determined by capability and peril (Howard, 2004).

Another theoretical framework that helps interpret these dynamics is Carl Schmitt's concept of the friend-enemy distinction. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term "rogue state," his political theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the ~~Another plausible explanation would be Carl Schmitt's assertion~~ label, in which he treats the "rogue state" label as a friend-enemy marker to explain why responses to states can be inconsistent. ~~the~~ criminalization of certain enemies and the drawing of a boundary between "normal" members and outlaw states that can be treated as exceptions. For Schmitt, the boundary lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. He contends that once an actor is viewed as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance.

Through his perspective, the term "rogue state" functions less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that legitimizes unprecedented behavior. ~~Schmitt contends that~~ ~~R~~ rather than a acting as a neutral reflection of an enemy's objective capability, the designation of a "rogue state" is often a tool used by ~~allows~~ dominant states to ~~legitimize~~ ~~depict~~ certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts ~~their own actions~~ against an enemy (Howard, 2004). ~~Moreover, calling a state "rogue" helps~~ reframe a regular adversary into an outlaw in which certain actions can be presented as necessary and justified. However, this framework does not resolve the Iraq-North Korea puzzle on its own, but it better conceptualizes how the politics of naming and criminalization influence which adversaries are "ultimate enemies" and which are negotiable.

~~On that account, the United States may label states as "rogue" in order to justify~~ intervention based on alleged dangers to the international community. ¶

Furthermore, Gordy and Lee (2009) extend this line of reasoning and contend that Cuba and North Korea are deemed as “rogue specters” because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms are perceived as dangerous to the international community, or more specifically the U.S. (Gordy & Lee, 2009). From this perspective, states are treated as threats due to their refusal to adopt a dominant free market and/or liberal narrative, which. This blatant refusal thereby complicates the American U.S. claims to universality and progress (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Hence, the very essence of North Korea and Cuba is rooted in being “specters” that challenge the supposed inevitability of global progress headed by the United States (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Scholars, therefore, view American responses to rogue states as attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity. ¶

Because Cuba and North Korea of their refusal to submit to American values, typically do not submit to American values, they Cuba and North Korea are constructed as enemies that warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation in the eyes of America. Because their continued survival validates the existence of alternative identities, and therefore warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation. Due to their continued survival being validation for the existence of alternative identities, the American U.S. universalist claims and rhetoric are defied and unsettled. Litwak asserts that from that point on, labeling a state as “rogue,” American policy strives to legitimize intervention and fortify American dominance, rather than impartially describing a type of regime. He illustrates the So, the United States reacting more vehemently to certain states that denounce their moral authority is in part because their existence and defiance not only threaten American security, but also its global authority. on the world stage. Therefore, The constant depiction of Cuba and North Korea as “rogue” is therefore read as

highlighting highlights the political nature of the threat they pose, which fundamentally challenges the universalist claim of the U.S.-led order (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Therefore, American responses to rogue states are attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity (Klare, 1995). Thus American responses to “rogue states” were never against isolated transgressions, but a reaction to the alternative identities that have the potential to prompt re-evaluation of American dominance. The literature ultimately stresses that an intrinsic understanding of varying American foreign policy decisions necessitates gauging the ideological narratives of each regime beyond their material capacity.



~~The Rogue State Label Beyond the United States~~

While the United States has used the “rogue state” label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term— they often prefer legal and treaty-based treaty-based terms. Routinely, American attempts to normalize push the “rogue state” term rubric are is met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries to the United States, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold that has been agreed upon. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a “rogue state” may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America’s closest allies remained historically have been reluctant to reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles,

the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning ~~both~~ the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). ~~Even if~~ ~~While~~ many American allies ~~may have endorsed~~ ~~endorse~~ the ~~nonproliferation in principle~~, ~~principles of nonproliferation~~, they still frequently ~~resisted~~ ~~resist~~ the American strategies of intervention, especially when they ~~lacked~~ ~~lack~~ international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal “rogue state” (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were ~~then~~ ~~subsequently~~ reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called “rogue states” did not behave in ways that were fundamentally ~~different~~ ~~divergent~~ from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998). ~~In fact, American efforts to isolate “rogue states” were persistently undercut by the interests and foreign policy of other major powers.~~

~~Many scholars, including~~ Christopher Bluth, ~~argues~~ that American efforts to isolate “rogue states” have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). ~~Chinese companies have even assisted Pyongyang in bypassing international scrutiny and allowing the regime to secure funding and technologies related to its nuclear and missile initiatives (China’s Facilitation of Sanctions and Export Control Evasion, n.d.).~~ The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). ~~For instance, both Russia and China have used their Security Council veto power to block and lessen penalties against North Korean sanctions violations (Cha & Kim, 2024).~~ ~~The~~ ~~However~~, the discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like ~~ee~~ Russia and China; rather

they reflect ~~a~~ the wider reluctance ~~among various states~~ to align with American terminology. ~~Not only is this absence of consensus evident in practice, but also~~ ~~I~~ in much literature, ~~where~~ the term is ~~believed to be~~ analytically indeterminate, ~~and th~~. The label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” ~~was~~ ~~was~~ met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). ~~For instance~~, Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the “rogue state label”, the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials ~~even~~ hinted at ~~the~~ ~~this~~ disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. ~~Stuar~~ ~~t~~ Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America’s sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and governments. ~~The European Union, during debates over Iran, resisted American pressures and chose to prioritize dialogue and economic ties to shape Iranian behavior~~ (Saunders, 2006). The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives. ¶

Conclusion

~~Decline and Transformation of Rogue State Rhetoric~~ ¶

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to ~~better~~ ~~help~~ justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald ~~Rea~~ ~~e~~ ~~g~~ ~~e~~ ~~a~~ ~~n~~, for instance, helped

mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (LitwaktheLitwak-U.S, 2001). This form of persuasion capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which thereby made harsh measures seem more appropriate and necessary. Yet,Yet many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, the implications extend beyond limited American capability to generate high political costs and strained relations among allies (Litwak, 2001). ¶

As pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both of themBoth demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

SimultaneouslyAt the same time, research also began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes. This, which further challenged the American notion that they “rogue states” constituted a distinct

category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, “rogue states” ~~rogue states~~ were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted “rogue states” ~~rogue states~~ thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives. ~~This research ultimately drew attention to the notion that the labels’ primary function was ideological and rhetorical, and intended to draw attention to enemies of the U.S.-led liberal order, rather than as a definition for a stable, objective category in international relations.~~

Thus, Conclusion¶¶

~~a~~ Across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to “rogue states” ~~rogue states~~ is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” ~~“rogue state”~~ is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the label’s validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a

deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a “rogue state”, the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an **ambiguous** uncoded-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
<p>1. to introduce the main concepts that will be discussed in the paper and the order in which these will be argued</p> <p>a. In the form of a paragraph suggest</p>	<p>I included the roadmap suggestion within both my abstract and my introduction for both flow and organization purposes.</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label’s conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between rivaling narratives, which supports the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.</p> <p>INTRODUCTION: Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It firstly argues the ambiguous, politically constructed nature of the “rogue state” term, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Secondly, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the label. Lastly, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates</p>

Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
		the implications for understanding why global responses remain divergent and largely inconsistent.
<p>2. a substantial portion of it has dwelt on the contested nature of the term “rogue states”</p> <p>a. paper was critiquing the term rather than the responses these states have received</p>	<p>I gave more reasoning and explanation of how the so-called ambiguity and vagueness of the term directly drives the varying global responses, incorporating this into both the abstract, introduction, and conclusion. This, of course, was in tangent with more reasoning within the body paragraphs. Moreover, I added more examples of other global responses to the term (mainly Russia and China). I also feel that since during my conclusion I state “Thus, across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to “rogue states” is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity” I simply needed to make the linkchains far earlier within my paper.</p>	<p>INTRODUCTION: This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This vagueness renders it impossible to know which states “rogue states” are truly “rogue” which fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion.</p> <p>EX: Chinese companies have even assisted Pyongyang in bypassing international scrutiny and allowing the regime to secure funding and technologies related to its nuclear and missile initiatives (China’s Facilitation of Sanctions and Export Control Evasion, n.d.).</p> <p>EX: For instance, both Russia and China have used their Security Council veto power to block and lessen penalties against North Korean sanctions violations (Cha & Kim, 2024).</p>
<p>3. clearly label these ‘rogue’ states and address each in detail</p>	<p>Within my introduction I gave a couple “commonly cited” rogue states. Within the case study discussion I also tried</p>	<p>Ex. For Libya, I added “terrorism repeatedly emphasized Qaddafi’s sponsorship of terrorism as</p>

Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
	<p>to include more analysis of the state, and give more evidence of their “rogue behavior.”</p>	<p>the locus of Libya’s threat and marking state-led terrorism as a unique, distinct behavior.”</p> <p>Ex. Analysis on U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force was justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002).</p> <p>Ex. Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.</p>
<p>4. I would have loved the author to interrogate in detail how the material, vis-à-vis the military capacity of the said rogue states</p>	<p>I would have absolutely loved to include a paragraph about how the material capacity influences “rogue states,” however, I felt it was more fitting, within my body paragraphs, to give more reasoning regarding how material capacity alone is not enough to determine varying responses.</p>	<p>Ex. Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force. (I believe this also applies to this suggestion)</p> <p>Ex. Although North Korea’s</p>

Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
		<p>nuclear capabilities in 2002 were more prominent than Iraq, Howard delineates that the varying responses was due to the different narratives and institutional habits that had accumulated in each relationship.</p> <p>Ex. “Taken together, these dynamics illustrate a distinct constructivist perspective: material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses; they are dependent upon previous and current “language-games” and institutional precedents that tell decision-makers what responses are legitimate and within the scope of imaginable.”</p> <p>Ex. For Schmitt, the boundary lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy.</p>
<p>5. language editor</p>	<p>Revised with my mentor Christopher Garity. I also changed the wording of much of my paper, deleted sentences I felt were unnecessary and tried to reduce the amount of words used. In short, I tried to keep my sentences concise and direct, rather than using fancy, sophisticated language.</p>	<p>Examples of words/phases deleted: especially regarding states, subsisted in treating the idea that certain regimes, the very essence.</p>
<p>6. revisit in-text citations</p>	<p>When rereading my paper</p>	<p>Ex: (Litwak, 2001),</p>

Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
	and making small edits for the purposes of consciousness, I also looked closely at pieces of evidence that were uncited, and inserted citations.	(Buchwald, 2019), (Schwartz, 2007; The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense on JSTOR, n.d.), (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption Wilson Center, 2011), (Zoubir, 2002)

Comment/Suggestion	My Response	In-Text:
clearer structure and sharper analytical signposting	Originally, I believe the main problem was that I did not directly state why said ambiguity poses an issue, or what my paper sought to resolve or conclude. Hence, I added several roadmaps, and lines of reasoning to better signal and organize the various claims and assertions of my paper. In doing this, I believe my paper flows much better, and it is more clear to the reader/audience what exactly it is I am addressing. Before, my paper was also lacking significant signposting and structure, however after several edits and	<p>Within Abstract: Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between rivaling narratives, which supports the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.</p> <p>Ex: This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state "rogue," much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This vagueness renders it impossible to know which states "rogue states" are truly "rogue" which fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion.</p>
single structured synthesis	Added a single structured synthesis both in the abstract and introduction as per the suggestions.	Abstract: Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness

		<p>and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between rivaling narratives, which supports the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.</p> <p>Introduction: Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It firstly argues the ambiguous, politically constructed nature of the “rogue state” term, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Secondly, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the label. Lastly, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses remain divergent and largely inconsistent.</p>
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abstract rewritten	Rewrote.	Please look at the text.
Title - from a question to a statement	<p>Changed the title to “Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States” as I wanted to still integrate my original title. In response to Reviewer 2 suggestions to change the word “Global” to something like “Western” or “American” I still feel like global is more demonstrative of my overall essay. While yes, I do focus a lot on the United States, I do this because of the term’s emergence from U.S. foreign policy and rhetoric. Hence, I feel as if changing the word “global” to the word “western” would draw away from this, and in a way, not address the overall bulk of my paper.</p>	Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States
the review is still overwhelmingly US-centric	<p>I know my review is overwhelmingly US-centric, but that is because the term “rogue state” is largely an American term, as it both emerged from the U.S. policy and rhetoric. I feel that since I added more sections explaining why the definition ambiguity is an issue, it is more clear why the review mentioned the U.S. so many times. But, I do</p>	<p>Ex. Analysis on U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force was justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002).</p> <p>Ex. Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was</p>

	<p>think I was lacking more global examples, so I added instances in which Russia and China directly defied the U.S.</p>	<p>invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.</p>
<p>Establish in the introduction first that the definition of rogue state is unclear and contested in the practice and theory of IR.</p>	<p>Inserted within the introduction.</p>	<p>Ex. In fact, the term “rogue state” is a profoundly unsettled concept in international law, and different governments habitually have had divergent perspectives on what constitutes a “rogue state,” and which states meet the criteria (Buchwald, 2019).</p>
<p>why this is a problem to research</p>	<p>Added this section within my paper, and I believe now I am better to convey how the definition ambiguity directly causes varying responses. I think it is significantly more clear to the audience.</p>	<p>Ex. This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This vagueness renders it impossible to know which states “rogue states” are truly “rogue” which fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion.</p>

<p>small paragraph that tells the reader how your paper supports your thesis/answer</p>	<p>For organizational purposes, and to better tell the reader what the purpose of my paper is, I inserted a roadmap both in my abstract and introduction. I feel that doing this makes my thesis more persuasive, and better structures my paper.</p>	<p>Ex. Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It firstly argues the ambiguous, politically constructed nature of the “rogue state” term, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Secondly, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the label. Lastly, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses remain divergent and largely inconsistent.</p>
<p>Citation practice improvements:</p>	<p>When rereading my paper and making small edits for the purposes of consciousness, I also looked closely at pieces of evidence that were uncited, and inserted citations.</p>	<p>Ex: (Litwak, 2001), (Buchwald, 2019), (Schwartz, 2007; The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense on JSTOR, n.d.), (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption Wilson Center, 2011), (Zoubir, 2002)</p>

<p>Iraq–North Korea - explicitly stating what this comparison demonstrates</p>	<p>I integrate the suggestion that I explicitly state what the comparison demonstrates, which is that the U.S. responses are not just driven by material threat, but also institutional precedent and the benefit of identifying regimes as an “enemy.”</p>	<p>Ex. Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.</p>
<p>Carl Schmitt - theoretical framework or merely an interpretive supplement?; political theory directly addresses the conceptual Foundation; engage with his work directly, or just focus on Howard’s case and example</p>	<p>In lieu of this suggestion, I engaged more with his work by speaking to his political theory, and how it lays the foundation for the friend enemy marker. I explain that this helps states legitimize certain behaviors. Moreover, I directly state how this framework does not resolve the puzzle but simply better conceptualizes “naming of enemies.”</p>	<p>Ex. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term “rogue state,” his political theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the label to explain the criminalization of certain enemies and the drawing of a boundary between “normal” members and outlaw states that can be treated as exceptions.</p> <p>Ex. For Schmitt, the boundary lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. He contends that once an actor is viewed as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance.</p> <p>Ex. However, this framework does not resolve the Iraq-North Korea puzzle on its own, but it better conceptualizes how the politics of naming and criminalization influence which adversaries are “ultimate enemies” and which are negotiable.</p> <p>Paragraph of more interaction</p>

		<p>with Schmitt: Through his perspective, the term “rogue state” functions less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that legitimizes unprecedented behavior. Rather than a reflection of an enemy’s objective capability, the designation of a “rogue state” allows dominant states to depict certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts against an enemy (Howard, 2004). Moreover, calling a state “rogue” helps reframe a regular adversary into an outlaw in which certain actions can be presented as necessary and justified. However, this framework does not resolve the Iraq-North Korea puzzle on its own, but it better conceptualizes how the politics of naming and criminalization influence which adversaries are “ultimate enemies” and which are negotiable.</p>
<p>Earlier structural signalling of the ambiguity that becomes central to explaining variation in responses</p>	<p>Starting from my abstract, I briefly mention the terms ambiguity, and then within my introduction I pose why this ambiguity poses a significant problem, and how my paper aims to address this problem. I believe that this aids the overall organization of my paper by better setting a precedent for ultimate conclusion of how this ambiguity directly leads to varying</p>	<p>Abstract: At the same time, the terms ambiguity and lack of objectivity have been at the forefront of scholarship and debate, with many scholars —namely Caprioli and Trumbore — noting the lack of consistent criteria and inconsistent usage of the term.</p> <p>Ex. This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus</p>

	<p>global responses.</p>	<p>on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes under a single category or heading. This vagueness renders it impossible to know which states “rogue states” are truly “rogue” which fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion. Moreover, considering recent empirical evidence, the notion that so-called “rogue states” are uniquely deviant is inconsistent with the evidence, which only further diminishes the analytical utility of the term (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).</p>
<p>recommend inserting a roadmap paragraph at the end of the introduction</p>	<p>I added a roadmap within both the introduction paragraph and the abstract paper. Within my introduction roadmap, I directly address the topics that my paper will be addressing in order for organization and structure purposes.</p>	<p>Ex. Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It firstly argues the ambiguous, politically constructed nature of the “rogue state” term, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Secondly, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the label. Lastly, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates</p>

		the implications for understanding why global responses remain divergent and largely inconsistent.
reposition the “decline of the label”	I integrated the “decline of the label” section within my conclusion, as I feel is best situated there.	Please look to the paper for text evidence.
If you have time time, optionally, a key opportunity would be to explicitly organise the literature into competing explanatory categories—for example: (1) materialist explanations (threat/capability), (2) constructivist explanations (identity and discourse), (3) institutional/diplomatic practice explanations (path dependency and precedent), and (4) geopolitical-interest explanations (alliance politics and strategic selectivity). This would make the paper feel less like a chronological overview and more like a conceptually organised review that guides the reader through scholarly debates.	I really like the structure of my paper as it is, and I felt that adding more clear examples, engaging more with certain scholarships, and having various roadmaps helps with the structural problems of my essay. I also added more transition words and topic sentences in order to improve the flow of my essay, so it does not feel like a dump of evidence.	N/A
Remove apostrophe mistakes: labels validity → label’s validity Fix spelling errors: Regean → Reagan, Stuard → Stuart Ensure consistent quotation marks around “rogue state”	Mistakes are all fixed.	Please look to the paper for text evidence.

Your revised essay goes a long way toward addressing the critiques and shows clear improvement in both structure and argumentation. Most importantly, you now present a much clearer central thesis early on, explicitly linking variation in responses to the conceptual ambiguity of the “rogue state” label and its roots in US foreign policy discourse. The Iraq–North Korea comparison has been strengthened significantly; you now clearly articulate its analytical payoff by showing that policy responses are shaped less by objective threat and more by diplomatic practices, institutional precedent, and rhetorical framing. Structurally, the essay is also more coherent overall.

However, the discussion of Carl Schmitt, while more careful than before, still feels somewhat detached from the main argument. Overall, the essay now meets the reviewer’s expectations for publication.

Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States

Sophie Martin

February 1, 2026

Abstract

Rogue states have been a contentious topic among scholars, yet in their simplest form, they can be defined as aggressive states or governments that aim to disrupt the balance of power by acquiring weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring international terrorism. At the same time, the term's ambiguity and lack of objectivity have been at the forefront of scholarship and debate, with many scholars —namely Caprioli and Trumbore— noting the lack of consistent criteria and inconsistent usage of the term. Hence, both the significance and analytical utility of the label have faced much scrutiny and criticism, especially as scholars contend that “rogue states” are unusually aggressive or prone to conflict is untrue; empirical evidence suggests that the behavior of alleged “rogue states” does not systemically differ from that of other states (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). In this sense, when considering the “Rogue State” label's origins in U.S. foreign policy, the term, rather than as a neutral reflection of objective threat, serves to construct certain “norm-violating” states as villains to mobilize preemptive, politicized measures (Homolar, 2011). Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between conflicting narratives, which support the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.

Introduction

The term “rogue state” is far from an objective analytical category; rather, it is a political construct historically embedded within the discourse and ideology of American foreign policy. Robert Litwak traces the term’s emergence to the post-Cold War era, when the Pentagon sought a quest for a new post-Cold War mission that would redefine threats after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Litwak, 2001). In the face of policymakers and media outlets routinely using the term to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Amidst this debate the label “rogue state” is best understood as a shifting, unilateral American political concept without a foundation in international law (Buchwald, 2019). In fact, the term “rogue state” is a profoundly unsettled concept in international law. Different governments habitually have had divergent perspectives on what constitutes a “rogue state,” and which states meet the criteria (Buchwald, 2019). Commonly cited “rogue states” include North Korea, Iran, Cuba, and Libya; Libya is no longer classified as a “rogue state” (Schwartz, 2007; *The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense* on JSTOR, n.d.) Thus, in the absence of a codified set of criteria for what a “rogue state” is, the label is a rhetorical tool to legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions, rather than a precise scholarly concept.

This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes

under a single category or heading. This conflation renders it impossible to know which “rogue” states are truly “rogue” and that fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion. Moreover, considering recent empirical evidence, the notion that so-called “rogue states” are uniquely deviant is inconsistent with the evidence, which only further diminishes the analytical utility of the term (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The U.S. State Department’s first publication of the annual list of states that sponsored terrorism contributed to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and threatening (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Existing research frequently notes three recurring ideas that arose from the publication: facilitation of terrorism, illicit weapons of mass destruction (WMD) acquisition, and opposition to dominant power and ideologies (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Likewise, early commentary in the Washington Post Editorial on Libya’s sponsorship of terrorism repeatedly emphasized Qaddafi’s sponsorship of terrorism as the locus of Libya’s threat. This marked state-led terrorism as a unique, distinct behavior. Such continuous framing of Libya’s state-sponsored terrorism set a precedent that facilitation of terrorism was a central indicator of “rogue” statehood in American discourse (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Therefore, the United States was allowed to invoke numerous tools —military strikes, unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, criminal prosecutions —to “change” Libya’s dangerous behavior (Schwartz, 2007).

Over time, the label expanded to encompass states seeking WMD and missile delivery systems, which anchored WMD proliferation as a key marker of a “rogue” statehood. Litwak, among other scholars, examined the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy and missile-defense debates, and concluded that “rogue states armed with WMD” were framed as the main post-Cold War threat (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption | Wilson Center, 2011). Thus, in the immediate

post-Cold War period, academic analysts portrayed isolated regimes as potential proliferators, which reinforced the link between isolation, terrorism, and WMD acquisition.

These fears and concerns of “rogue state” proliferation and aggression were then intensified and amplified when American officials explicitly identified certain regimes as central threats to national security. For instance, former Secretary of State James Baker, during his 1989 Senate remarks, stressed the dangers posed by ballistic missiles and chemical warheads that had fallen into the hands of aggressive, terrorism supporting governments (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). As a result, the supposed threat of “rogue states” drove U.S. foreign policy and was used as important justification in numerous policy decisions. Analysis on U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force were justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002). This logic was consistent with the many arguments for maintaining high defense spending and advanced weapons systems. Senator John Tower, for example, justified the continual investment in the B-2 stealth bomber by referencing certain “rogue regimes” having acquired sophisticated air defenses and state-of-the-art weapons (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Building on this, he claimed that the B-2 stealth bomber was crucial to countering the unpredictable nature of “rogue states.” At the close of the 20th century, these attributes, although never fully agreed upon, became de-facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states.

Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It first argues the term “rogue state” is ambiguously and politically constructed, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Second, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the

significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the “rogue state” label. Finally, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses vary.

Politicization and Ambiguity of the Rogue State Label

The term “rogue state” became ubiquitous in U.S. policy discourse during the Clinton Administration and was continued during the Bush Administration. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, George W. Bush, identified so-called rogue states as the “gravest” threat to American national security, labeling North Korea, Iraq, and Iran major threats requiring preemptive and anticipatory action (Homolar, 2011). Concurrently, scholars such as Litwak emphasized that the term originated as a unilateral American political tool that functioned primarily as a changing U.S. foreign policy lexicon (Litwak, 2001). Within this context, due to the label growing out of American rhetoric instead of a multilateral framework, its meaning remained extremely fluid and dependent upon American rhetorical needs.

The 2002 National Security Strategy marked a broader shift in American policy from a containment approach to one that legitimated unilateral military intervention and structured policy as more assertive and proactive towards states deemed “rogue.” In the aftermath of this shift, arms controls and nonproliferation documents repeatedly stressed efforts to prevent the leakage of WMD materials and missile technologies to “rogue” regimes, casting them as the primary proliferation concern (O’Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, subsequent missile defense and military initiatives were likewise justified as the necessary course of action to sustain restrictions on rogue state weapons development and deployment (O’Reilly, 2007). Yet this agenda was

entirely reliant on a term whose attributes remained ill-defined; U.S. officials, in the years following, treated “rogue states” as the epicenter of threat amid extensive debate and opposition.

Nevertheless, many analysts assert that the term functioned to fill a conceptual gap in American security strategy and remained skeptical that the regimes identified as rogue truly constituted a coherent category. When observing states such as North Korea and Cuba, scholars suggested the dangers they posed were exaggerated into hyperbolic, alarmist terms (Gordy & Lee, 2009). In this sense, the “rogue state” rubric became a tool for controlling narratives and further legitimizing unilateral American policy initiatives and interests (Gordy & Lee, 2009). These analyses exemplify that this rhetoric underwrote the foundation for a broad array of policy decisions. Without transparent criteria, the politically charged attributes of the label revealed an overall lack of precision and objectivity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The Rogue State Label in Practice

Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was among those who argued that the United States possessed the responsibility to neutralize, contain, and develop so-called “rogue states” into more constructive members of the international community (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, this way of thinking settled into American discourse, creating a strategic mechanism for the way North Korea and Iraq were treated in U.S. policy. Both countries were portrayed as dangerous outliers whose ambitions and defiance necessitated unique, targeted measures. Yet the stark contrast between war with Iraq and diplomacy in North Korea served as evidence that the “rogue state” rubric rarely reflected material threat, as regimes labeled in a similar appellation prompted notably different policy responses. This contrast demonstrates another example that the “rogue state” label failed to generate consistent, uniform policy responses; rather, responses are channeled through historical narratives, language-games, and

friend-enemy distinctions that render a “rogue” as manageable through either diplomacy or military action.

In response to the North Korean nuclear program, the United States dispatched the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to Pyongyang to pursue diplomatic engagement and offer benefits in exchange for reductions, even as it sought authorization to use military force against Iraq. Even after North Korea’s secret nuclear program to develop enriched uranium weapons was exposed, the Bush administration persisted with diplomacy and negotiation to resolve the conflict, sending numerous diplomats to confer with “friends and allies” (Howard, 2004). Such language demonstrates the U.S. intention to handle the DPRK problem multilaterally. By contrast, despite Iraq’s inability at that time to produce enough weapons-grade material to make a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States still pursued harsher unilateral measures that culminated in war (Howard, 2004). It is important to note that North Korea, at this time, had already demonstrated its greater nuclear and military capability, which included its capacity to produce dozens of nuclear bombs (Nikitin, n.d.). Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.

Peter Howard asserts that neither realism nor norm-focused constructivism can fully account for this divergence since both would predict the more threatening state to attract a more forceful balancing response (Howard, 2004). He instead emphasizes a language-based constructivist approach that epitomizes how entrenched diplomatic practices function as a game of negotiation, which limits the perceived many of responses and renders large-scale military

action against North Korea unthinkable (Howard, 2004). Although North Korea's nuclear capabilities in 2002 were more prominent than Iraq, Howard delineates that the varying responses was due to the different narratives and institutional habits that had accumulated in each relationship. (Howard, 2004). U.S. dealings with Iraq were long associated with long-standing patterns of confrontation and imposition dating back to the 1991 Gulf War, so Iraq had already been constructed as an appropriate target for military operations (Howard, 2004). Conversely, North Korea was met with diplomacy on account of routine interactions centered on crisis management and bargaining that was embedded in cooperative frameworks (Howard, 2004). Taken together, these dynamics illustrate a distinct constructivist perspective: material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses; they are dependent upon previous and current "language-games" and institutional precedents that tell decision-makers what responses are legitimate and within the scope of imaginable. More generally, the political implications of a "rogue state" are mediated by diplomatic practice and discussion, rather than being solely determined by capability and peril (Howard, 2004).

Another theoretical framework that helps interpret these dynamics is Carl Schmitt's concept of the friend-enemy distinction. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term "rogue state," his theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the label to explain the construction of certain states as "enemies" that often justifies harsh or unforeseen responses to "rogue states." He argues that an enemy is whomever represents some existential threat to a particular political collectivity, and that once an actor is categorized as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt details how criminalization of the hostis—otherwise known as a recognized enemy with political standing—legitimizes an

“immensely intensified and enlarged antagonism” (Yamato, 2020). Given this premise, the “rogue state” label functions in a similar manner; labeling a state as “rogue” is an act of criminalization that situates the state outside the boundaries of diplomacy. Once a state is outside the boundaries, sanctions, isolation, and military force are seen as necessary and warranted. This boundary, however, lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. In this sense, the term “rogue state” is less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that allows dominant states to depict certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts against an enemy (Howard, 2004). It is important to note, however, that when a state attempts to universalize its own friend-enemy distinction, it does not always produce consensus. Different states will have their own friend-enemy distinctions, which is among the reasons why there is frequently variation in responses to “rogue states.”

In fact, this tension can deepen when the friend-enemy distinction is rooted not just in material capability and threat, but in ideological dissonance. States like Cuba and North Korea may be deemed as “rogue” simply because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms is perceived by the United States as dangerous to the international community. (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Because Cuba and North Korea refuse to adopt the dominant free market and liberal narrative, American claims to universality and progress are complicated (Gordy & Lee, 2009). So, they are constructed— by the U.S. —as enemies that warrant strong feelings of confrontation and exclusion, because their continued survival defies and unsettles American universalist claims and rhetoric. However, because the degree of perceived ideological threat differs, American responses to different “rogue states” often varies.

Beyond the United States

While the United States used the "rogue state" label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term— they often prefer legal and treaty-based terms. Routinely, American attempts to push the "rogue state" rubric is met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries to the United States, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold that has been agreed upon. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a "rogue state" may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America's closest allies historically have been reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles, the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Even if many American allies endorse the nonproliferation in principle, they still frequently resist the American strategies of intervention, especially when they lack international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal "rogue state" (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were subsequently reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called "rogue states" did not behave in ways that were fundamentally divergent from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998).

Christopher Bluth argues that American efforts to isolate "rogue states" have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide

continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). Chinese companies have even assisted Pyongyang in bypassing international scrutiny and allowing the regime to secure funding and technologies related to its nuclear and missile initiatives (China's Facilitation of Sanctions and Export Control Evasion, n.d.). The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). For instance, both Russia and China have used their Security Council veto power to block and lessen penalties against North Korean sanctions violations (Cha & Kim, 2024). However, the discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like Russia and China; rather they reflect the wider reluctance to align with American terminology. In much literature, the term is analytically indeterminate, and the label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” was met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the “rogue state label,” the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials even hinted at this disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. Stuart Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America's sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and

governments. The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives.

Conclusion

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to help justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald Reagan, for instance, helped mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (Litwak, 2001). This capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which made harsh measures seem more appropriate and necessary. Yet many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, as pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

At the same time, research also began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes. This further challenged the American notion that “rogue states” constituted a distinct category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, “rogue states” were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted “rogue states” thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives.

Thus, across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to “rogue states” is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the label’s validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated

how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a “rogue state,” the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an ambiguous uncodified-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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Variation in Global Responses to Rogue States

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Abstract

Rogue states have been a contentious topic among scholars, yet in their simplest form, they can be defined as aggressive states or governments that aim to disrupt the balance of power by acquiring weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring international terrorism. At the same time, the term's ambiguity and lack of objectivity have been at the forefront of scholarship and debate, with many scholars —namely Caprioli and Trumbore— noting the lack of consistent criteria and inconsistent usage of the term. Hence, both the significance and analytical utility of the label have faced much scrutiny and criticism, especially as scholars contend that “rogue states” are unusually aggressive or prone to conflict is untrue; empirical evidence suggests that the behavior of alleged “rogue states” does not systemically differ from that of other states (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). In this sense, when considering the “Rogue State” label's origins in U.S. foreign policy, the term, rather than as a neutral reflection of objective threat, serves to construct certain “norm-violating” states as villains to mobilize preemptive, politicized measures (Homolar, 2011). Therefore, this paper argues that variation in global responses to so-called rogue states is but a residual anomaly of the label's conceptual precariousness and emergence from U.S. foreign policy language and calculated rhetoric. Consequently, responses such as diplomacy, intervention, and sanctions reflect the interaction between conflicting narratives, which support the conclusion that variation in response to rogue states is an inherent feature of the term itself.

Introduction

The term “rogue state” is far from an objective analytical category; rather, it is a political construct historically embedded within the discourse and ideology of American foreign policy. Robert Litwak traces the term’s emergence to the post-Cold War era, when the Pentagon sought a quest for a new post-Cold War mission that would redefine threats after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Litwak, 2001). In the face of policymakers and media outlets routinely using the term to describe aggressive, abnormal states, critics still question the category’s precision and validity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Amidst this debate the label “rogue state” is best understood as a shifting, unilateral American political concept without a foundation in international law (Buchwald, 2019). In fact, the term “rogue state” is a profoundly unsettled concept in international law. Different governments habitually have had divergent perspectives on what constitutes a “rogue state,” and which states meet the criteria (Buchwald, 2019). Commonly cited “rogue states” include North Korea, Iran, Cuba, and Libya; Libya is no longer classified as a “rogue state” (Schwartz, 2007; *The Rogue State Doctrine and National Missile Defense* on JSTOR, n.d.) Thus, in the absence of a codified set of criteria for what a “rogue state” is, the label is a rhetorical tool to legitimize certain American foreign policy decisions, rather than a precise scholarly concept.

This definitional ambiguity poses a significant problem for theory and practice in international relations. Absent consensus on which behaviors, capabilities, and normative violations render a state “rogue,” much research and scholarship conflate heterogeneous regimes

under a single category or heading. This conflation renders it impossible to know which “rogue” states are truly “rogue” and that fundamentally hinders any effort to draw a substantial conclusion. Moreover, considering recent empirical evidence, the notion that so-called “rogue states” are uniquely deviant is inconsistent with the evidence, which only further diminishes the analytical utility of the term (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The U.S. State Department’s first publication of the annual list of states that sponsored terrorism contributed to the idea that certain regimes were uniquely anomalous and threatening (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Existing research frequently notes three recurring ideas that arose from the publication: facilitation of terrorism, illicit weapons of mass destruction (WMD) acquisition, and opposition to dominant power and ideologies (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Likewise, early commentary in the Washington Post Editorial on Libya’s sponsorship of terrorism repeatedly emphasized Qaddafi’s sponsorship of terrorism as the locus of Libya’s threat. This marked state-led terrorism as a unique, distinct behavior. Such continuous framing of Libya’s state-sponsored terrorism set a precedent that facilitation of terrorism was a central indicator of “rogue” statehood in American discourse (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Therefore, the United States was allowed to invoke numerous tools —military strikes, unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, criminal prosecutions —to “change” Libya’s dangerous behavior (Schwartz, 2007).

Over time, the label expanded to encompass states seeking WMD and missile delivery systems, which anchored WMD proliferation as a key marker of a “rogue” statehood. Litwak, among other scholars, examined the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy and missile-defense debates, and concluded that “rogue states armed with WMD” were framed as the main post-Cold War threat (The New Calculus of Pre-Emption | Wilson Center, 2011). Thus, in the immediate

post-Cold War period, academic analysts portrayed isolated regimes as potential proliferators, which reinforced the link between isolation, terrorism, and WMD acquisition.

These fears and concerns of “rogue state” proliferation and aggression were then intensified and amplified when American officials explicitly identified certain regimes as central threats to national security. For instance, former Secretary of State James Baker, during his 1989 Senate remarks, stressed the dangers posed by ballistic missiles and chemical warheads that had fallen into the hands of aggressive, terrorism supporting governments (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). As a result, the supposed threat of “rogue states” drove U.S. foreign policy and was used as important justification in numerous policy decisions. Analysis on U.S. strategy in the 1990s notes that the Pentagon’s two-war doctrine and plans for military force were justified on the grounds that “rogue states” such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and North Korea were dangerously aggressive (Zoubir, 2002). This logic was consistent with the many arguments for maintaining high defense spending and advanced weapons systems. Senator John Tower, for example, justified the continual investment in the B-2 stealth bomber by referencing certain “rogue regimes” having acquired sophisticated air defenses and state-of-the-art weapons (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Building on this, he claimed that the B-2 stealth bomber was crucial to countering the unpredictable nature of “rogue states.” At the close of the 20th century, these attributes, although never fully agreed upon, became de-facto prerequisites for classifying rogue states.

Therefore, this paper utilizes the contested nature of the term to address the question: why is there variation in global responses to so-called “rogue states?” It first argues the term “rogue state” is ambiguously and politically constructed, tracing its emergence to U.S. discourse and rhetoric. Second, this paper examines how policymakers have used the term, focusing on the

significance of narrative, “language games,” and perceived patterns of behavior for states such as Iraq and North Korea. Moreover, this paper analyzes the responses of U.S. allies and other major powers, and how they reinterpret or reject the “rogue state” label. Finally, this paper assesses literature that demonstrates the implications for understanding why global responses vary.

Politicization and Ambiguity of the Rogue State Label

The term “rogue state” became ubiquitous in U.S. policy discourse during the Clinton Administration and was continued during the Bush Administration. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, George W. Bush, identified so-called rogue states as the “gravest” threat to American national security, labeling North Korea, Iraq, and Iran major threats requiring preemptive and anticipatory action (Homolar, 2011). Concurrently, scholars such as Litwak emphasized that the term originated as a unilateral American political tool that functioned primarily as a changing U.S. foreign policy lexicon (Litwak, 2001). Within this context, due to the label growing out of American rhetoric instead of a multilateral framework, its meaning remained extremely fluid and dependent upon American rhetorical needs.

The 2002 National Security Strategy marked a broader shift in American policy from a containment approach to one that legitimated unilateral military intervention and structured policy as more assertive and proactive towards states deemed “rogue.” In the aftermath of this shift, arms controls and nonproliferation documents repeatedly stressed efforts to prevent the leakage of WMD materials and missile technologies to “rogue” regimes, casting them as the primary proliferation concern (O’Reilly, 2007). Accordingly, subsequent missile defense and military initiatives were likewise justified as the necessary course of action to sustain restrictions on rogue state weapons development and deployment (O’Reilly, 2007). Yet this agenda was

entirely reliant on a term whose attributes remained ill-defined; U.S. officials, in the years following, treated “rogue states” as the epicenter of threat amid extensive debate and opposition.

Nevertheless, many analysts assert that the term functioned to fill a conceptual gap in American security strategy and remained skeptical that the regimes identified as rogue truly constituted a coherent category. When observing states such as North Korea and Cuba, scholars suggested the dangers they posed were exaggerated into hyperbolic, alarmist terms (Gordy & Lee, 2009). In this sense, the “rogue state” rubric became a tool for controlling narratives and further legitimizing unilateral American policy initiatives and interests (Gordy & Lee, 2009). These analyses exemplify that this rhetoric underwrote the foundation for a broad array of policy decisions. Without transparent criteria, the politically charged attributes of the label revealed an overall lack of precision and objectivity (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005).

The Rogue State Label in Practice

Former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was among those who argued that the United States possessed the responsibility to neutralize, contain, and develop so-called “rogue states” into more constructive members of the international community (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). Over time, this way of thinking settled into American discourse, creating a strategic mechanism for the way North Korea and Iraq were treated in U.S. policy. Both countries were portrayed as dangerous outliers whose ambitions and defiance necessitated unique, targeted measures. Yet the stark contrast between war with Iraq and diplomacy in North Korea served as evidence that the “rogue state” rubric rarely reflected material threat, as regimes labeled in a similar appellation prompted notably different policy responses. This contrast demonstrates another example that the “rogue state” label failed to generate consistent, uniform policy responses; rather, responses are channeled through historical narratives, language-games, and

friend-enemy distinctions that render a “rogue” as manageable through either diplomacy or military action.

In response to the North Korean nuclear program, the United States dispatched the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to Pyongyang to pursue diplomatic engagement and offer benefits in exchange for reductions, even as it sought authorization to use military force against Iraq. Even after North Korea’s secret nuclear program to develop enriched uranium weapons was exposed, the Bush administration persisted with diplomacy and negotiation to resolve the conflict, sending numerous diplomats to confer with “friends and allies” (Howard, 2004). Such language demonstrates the U.S. intention to handle the DPRK problem multilaterally. By contrast, despite Iraq’s inability at that time to produce enough weapons-grade material to make a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States still pursued harsher unilateral measures that culminated in war (Howard, 2004). It is important to note that North Korea, at this time, had already demonstrated its greater nuclear and military capability, which included its capacity to produce dozens of nuclear bombs (Nikitin, n.d.). Because North Korea, otherwise known as the more materially threatening state, was handled through diplomacy while Iraq was invaded, U.S. responses were driven less by actual threat levels and more by institutional precedent, diplomatic “language-games,” and the political utility of identifying enemies as suitable objects of force.

Peter Howard asserts that neither realism nor norm-focused constructivism can fully account for this divergence since both would predict the more threatening state to attract a more forceful balancing response (Howard, 2004). He instead emphasizes a language-based constructivist approach that epitomizes how entrenched diplomatic practices function as a game of negotiation, which limits the perceived many of responses and renders large-scale military

action against North Korea unthinkable (Howard, 2004). Although North Korea's nuclear capabilities in 2002 were more prominent than Iraq, Howard delineates that the varying responses was due to the different narratives and institutional habits that had accumulated in each relationship. (Howard, 2004). U.S. dealings with Iraq were long associated with long-standing patterns of confrontation and imposition dating back to the 1991 Gulf War, so Iraq had already been constructed as an appropriate target for military operations (Howard, 2004). Conversely, North Korea was met with diplomacy on account of routine interactions centered on crisis management and bargaining that was embedded in cooperative frameworks (Howard, 2004). Taken together, these dynamics illustrate a distinct constructivist perspective: material circumstances and objective threat are not enough to fully account for variation in policy responses; they are dependent upon previous and current "language-games" and institutional precedents that tell decision-makers what responses are legitimate and within the scope of imaginable. More generally, the political implications of a "rogue state" are mediated by diplomatic practice and discussion, rather than being solely determined by capability and peril (Howard, 2004).

Another theoretical framework that helps interpret these dynamics is Carl Schmitt's concept of the friend-enemy distinction. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term "rogue state," his ~~political~~ theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the label to explain the ~~criminalization~~ ~~construction of certain states as "enemies" that often justifies harsh or unforeseen responses to "rogue states."~~ ~~of certain enemies and the drawing of a boundary between "normal" members and outlaw states that can be treated as exceptions.~~ For Schmitt, the ~~boundary lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy.~~ ~~He argues that an enemy is whomever represents~~

some existential threat to a particular political collectivity, and that once an actor is categorized as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance. He contends that once an actor is viewed as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt details how criminalization of the hostis—otherwise known as a recognized enemy with political standing—legitimizes an “immensely intensified and enlarged antagonism” (Yamato, 2020). Given this premise, the “rogue state” label functions in a similar manner; labeling a state as “rogue” is an act of criminalization that situates the state outside the boundaries of diplomacy. Once a state is outside the boundaries, sanctions, isolation, and military force are seen as necessary and warranted. This boundary, however, lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. In this sense, ¶

Through his perspective, the term “rogue state” functions less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that legitimizes unprecedented behavior. Rather than a reflection of an enemy's objective capability, the designation of a “rogue state” allows dominant states to depict certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts against an enemy (Howard, 2004). It is important to note, however, that when a state attempts to universalize its own friend-enemy distinction, it does not always produce consensus. Different states will have their own friend-enemy distinctions, which is among the reasons why there is frequently variation in responses to “rogue states.” Moreover, calling a state “rogue” helps reframe a regular adversary into an outlaw in which certain actions can be presented as necessary and justified. However, this framework does not resolve the Iraq-North Korea puzzle on its own, but it better conceptualizes how the politics of naming and criminalization influence which adversaries are “ultimate enemies” and which are negotiable.

In fact, this tension can deepen when the friend-enemy distinction is rooted not just in material capability and threat, but in ideological dissonance. States like ~~Gordy and Lee (2009)~~ extend this line of reasoning and contend that Cuba and North Korea ~~are~~ may be deemed as “rogue” ~~because simply because~~ their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms is perceived ~~by the United States~~ as dangerous to ~~the the~~ international community, ~~or more specifically the U.S.~~ (Gordy & Lee, 2009). ~~Because Cuba and North Korea refuse to adopt the dominant free market and liberal narrative, American claims to universality and progress are complicated.~~ From this perspective, states are treated as threats ~~because of their refusal to adopt a dominant free market or liberal narrative, which thereby complicates the U.S. claims to universality and progress~~ (Gordy & Lee, 2009). ~~So, they are constructed—~~ by the U.S. —as enemies that warrant strong feelings of confrontation and exclusion, because their continued survival defies and unsettles American universalist claims and rhetoric. ~~Thus, North Korea and Cuba are “specters” that challenge the supposed inevitability of global progress headed by the United States (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Because of their refusal to submit to American values, Cuba and North Korea are constructed as enemies that warrant strong feelings of exclusion and confrontation in the eyes of America. Because their continued survival validates the existence of alternative identities, U.S. universalist claims and rhetoric are defied and unsettled.~~ However, because the degree of perceived ideological threat differs, American responses to different “rogue states” often varies. ~~From that point on, labeling a state as “rogue,” American policy strives to legitimize intervention and fortify American dominance. So, the United States reacting more vehemently to certain is because their existence and defiance not only threaten American security, but its global authority. Therefore, the constant depiction of Cuba and North Korea as “rogue” highlights the political nature of the threat they pose, which fundamentally challenges~~

~~the universalist claim of the U.S.-led order (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Therefore, American responses to rogue states are attempts to erase the existential challenge alternative identities pose to the idea of a more singular, capitalist, modernity (Klare, 1995).~~

Beyond the United States

While the United States used the "rogue state" label as a central part of its post-Cold War strategy, other countries have been far more hesitant in embracing the term— they often prefer legal and treaty-based terms. Routinely, American attempts to push the “rogue state” rubric is met with skepticism, criticism, and hesitation – notably among states that regard the label as arbitrary and politically charged. This is often attributed to the term being used to describe a set of adversaries to the United States, rather than to a clearly specified behavior threshold that has been agreed upon. Hence the term serves more as a contingent political categorization than quantifiable metrics for which a “rogue state” may be identified.

Despite U.S. foreign policy supremacy, many of America’s closest allies historically have been reluctant to embrace the term, for outside of American circles, the label is frequently rejected, with much academic literature questioning the validity and utility of the term (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Even if many American allies endorse the nonproliferation in principle, they still frequently resist the American strategies of intervention, especially when they lack international authorization (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2005). This reluctance was clear when key allies failed to support or align with American military action during the 1998 Iraq crisis, despite the persistent portrayals of Iraq as an archetypal “rogue state” (Kim & Hundt, 2011). These skepticisms were subsequently reinforced with many studies at the time indicating that so-called “rogue states” did not behave in ways that were fundamentally divergent from other authoritarian states (Klare, 1998).

Christopher Bluth argues that American efforts to isolate “rogue states” have been persistently undermined by the interests and of other major powers (Bluth, 2017). North Korea, for example, has survived through exploiting the willingness of states like China to provide continuous diplomatic and economic support (Bluth, 2017). Chinese companies have even assisted Pyongyang in bypassing international scrutiny and allowing the regime to secure funding and technologies related to its nuclear and missile initiatives (China’s Facilitation of Sanctions and Export Control Evasion, n.d.). The ultimate effectiveness of the American sanctions and isolation is then eroded when states – chiefly Russia and China – fail to align and support U.S rhetoric and policy fully (Bluth, 2017). For instance, both Russia and China have used their Security Council veto power to block and lessen penalties against North Korean sanctions violations (Cha & Kim, 2024). However, the discrepancies between American rhetoric and diverging interests are not limited to states like Russia and China; rather they reflect the wider reluctance to align with American terminology. In much literature, the term is analytically indeterminate, and the label, along with more dramatic formulations such as the “axis of evil,” was met with significant resistance among traditional U.S. allies within the European Union (Bluth, 2017). Former French Ambassador Eric Rouleau contended that due to there being no French equivalent for the “rogue state label,” the states did not exist as a legitimate category within French political vocabulary (Saunders, 2006). His contentions capture and reflect the sweeping European reluctance and rejection of the label.

During public statements and testimonies, many American officials even hinted at this disparity between American rhetoric and allied acumen. Stuart Eizenstat, during his congressional testimony, expressed frustration that allied governments did not share America’s sense of urgency regarding “rogue states” (Saunders, 2006). Even as the U.S. pushed to form a

coalition to isolate “rogue states” with military force and sanctions, the ultimate validity of the label remained widely controversial and contested among analysts, policymakers, and governments. The widespread dismissal exhibited the refusal of many institutions to submit to American ideology and narratives.

Conclusion

Using dramatic diction and parlance, policymakers hoped to mobilize public support to help justify sanctions and American intervention. Ronald Reagan, for instance, helped mobilize support for defense spending in the early 1980s by framing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” (Litwak, 2001). This capitalized on the American tendency to view foreign affairs as a raging battle between good and evil, which made harsh measures seem more appropriate and necessary. Yet many scholars argued that grouping too many diverse regimes under a single designation rendered American policy unable to respond to emerging trends and political dynamics (Litwak, 2001). When observing the North Korean case, the generic strategy exposed the tensions with uniform procedures; scholars observed that the United States found itself limited in their diplomatic avenues and efficiency (Litwak, 2001). Moreover, as pressure to formalize the “rogue state” rubric intensified, American allies and partners became even more opposed to such a “rigid” policy. After the 1986 U.S. Airstrikes against Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya, France adopted a considerably different diplomatic posture from its counterparts, such as the U.S. and Britain. Both demanded that the Libyan suspects be moved to Western courts for trial, whereas France declined to call for the transfer of suspects, acceptance of responsibility, or even compensation as the U.S. demanded (Schwartz, 2007). France, which was one of America’s closest allies at the time, was unwilling to adopt the unilateral strategy that the U.S. pushed for

under the “rogue state” label, which echoed the growing disengagement from American diplomatic overtures.

At the same time, research also began to depict that “rogue states” were not exclusively irrational when compared to other authoritarian and non-democratic regimes. This further challenged the American notion that “rogue states” constituted a distinct category. Studies on sanctions and non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran demonstrated how North Korea had repeatedly adjusted its nuclear testing and negotiation posture in response to changing sanctions and security guarantees, which scholars interpret to be an adaptation to pressure (Wertz & Vaez, 2012). Moreover, “rogue states” were depicted as deliberately using nuclear and missile programs as bargaining chips in the face of sanctions and isolation (Henriksen, 2001). Scholars interpreted “rogue states” thus as structuring their proliferation and conflict behavior around anticipated external responses and incentives.

Thus, across the literature reviewed, global variation in responses to “rogue states” is often interpreted by scholars to be a consequence of the label’s inherent ambiguity. Instead of representing a coherent, objective set of criteria, the label “rogue state” is portrayed as a historically contingent construct that is heavily based upon American rhetoric. The term, which began as a narrow label to depict states that sponsored terrorism, gradually grew over time to encompass states challenging western ideologies and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. However, absent a definitional framework with clear criteria, the term continues to remain heavily context dependent and actor specific. As a result, many scholars question the label’s validity and usefulness, especially considering its historic association with American rhetoric and interests.

All in all, the mass body of scholarship implies that variation in global responses is not merely a byproduct of conflicting interests and ideologies, but something that stems from a deeper disparity in interpretive rhetoric. American foreign policy has continuously illustrated how entrenched historical associations – which are exemplified through case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba – shapes expectations and influences the authority of policy choices. Consequent to no universally accepted or agreed-upon criteria for what would constitute a “rogue state,” the term altogether remains widely disputed within scholarly circles. What counts as “rogue” is rather dependent on who is doing the labeling, what interests are being prioritized, and what narratives are being considered. The collective body of literature suggests that if “rogue state” remains an ambiguous uncodified-disputed label, variation in global responses is best understood as an inherent feature of the term itself.

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<https://www.redalyc.org/journal/218/21868580007/html/>

Zoubir, Y. H. (2002). Libya in US foreign policy: From rogue state to good fellow? *Third World Quarterly*, 23(1), 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590220108162>

FEEDBACK: incorporate and link your discussion of Carl Schmitt with the rest of the paper, particularly as a theoretical anchor/unification for concepts already introduced earlier. Right now, Schmitt is introduced after the Iraq/North Korea discussion as a kind of aside, rather than with more details as to how Schmitt could still explain the "Iraq-North Korea puzzle."

MY RESPONSE: I now use the Carl Schmitt friend-enemy distinction to lay the precedent for my later explanation that because the very act of constructing a state as an enemy is extremely subjective, there will always be variation in the responses to rogue states. I explain that because the degree of perceived ideological threat differs, the responses to different "rogue states" may vary. I also better integrated the subsequent paragraph that talked about North Korea and Cuba within my larger argument about variation in responses to rogue states. At the end of the Schmitt paragraph I added "It is important to note, however, that when a state attempts to universalize its own friend-enemy distinction, it does not always produce consensus. Different states will have their own friend-enemy distinctions, which is among the reasons why there is frequently variation in responses to "rogue states."" in order to better connect Schmitt's theory to my overall argument. In addition, at the end of the paragraph I originally talked about Gordy and Lee, I added "For while Cuba, North Korea, and Iran were all constructed as ideological enemies of the American liberal order, Cuba was isolated with embargos, North Korea was discreetly handled, and Iran faced military intervention and sanctions. Since the construction of a state as an enemy is always a relational judgement, the subsequent responses that attach will always vary." to make a more cohesive line of reasoning.

IN TEXT CHANGE:

Another theoretical framework that helps interpret these dynamics is Carl Schmitt's concept of the friend-enemy distinction. Although Schmitt never used the contemporary term "rogue state," his theory speaks directly to the conceptual foundations of the label to explain the construction of certain states as "enemies" that often justifies harsh or unforeseen responses to "rogue states." He argues that an enemy is whomever represents some existential threat to a particular political collectivity, and that once an actor is categorized as an enemy, rules are held in abeyance. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt details how criminalization of the hostis—otherwise known as a recognized enemy with political standing—legitimizes an "immensely intensified and enlarged antagonism" (Yamato, 2020). Given this premise, the "rogue state" label functions in a similar manner; labeling a state as "rogue" is an act of criminalization that situates the state outside the boundaries of diplomacy. Once a state is outside the boundaries, sanctions, isolation, and military force are seen as necessary and warranted. This boundary, however, lies not in material or measurable capabilities but in decisions about who counts as a legitimate partner and who is cast as an enemy. In this sense, the term "rogue state" is less as an objective describer of behavior and more as a friend-enemy marker that allows dominant states to depict certain regimes as irrational outliers and authorize sanctions, isolation, or even war as defensive acts against an enemy (Howard, 2004). It is important to note, however, that when a state attempts to universalize its own friend-enemy distinction, it does not always produce consensus. Different states will have their own friend-enemy distinctions, which is among the reasons why there is frequent variation in responses to "rogue states."

In fact, this tension can deepen when the friend-enemy distinction is rooted not just in material capability and threat, but in ideological dissonance. States like Cuba and North Korea may be deemed as “rogue” simply because their ongoing survival and rhetorical defiance of liberal international norms is perceived by the United States as dangerous to the international community. (Gordy & Lee, 2009). Because Cuba and North Korea refuse to adopt the dominant free market and liberal narrative, American claims to universality and progress are complicated (Gordy & Lee, 2009). So, they are constructed— by the U.S. —as enemies that warrant strong feelings of confrontation and exclusion, because their continued survival defies and unsettles American universalist claims and rhetoric. However, because the degree of perceived ideological threat differs, American responses to different “rogue states” often varies. For while Cuba, North Korea, and Iran were all constructed as ideological enemies of the American liberal order, Cuba was isolated with embargos, North Korea was discreetly handled, and Iran faced military intervention and sanctions. Since the construction of a state as an enemy is always a relational judgement, the subsequent responses that attach will always vary.