

IDENTIFYING ROGUE STATES: ISSUES OF POLICY AND ACTION

Which are the true “rogue” states? What is “rogueness” in the international arena? Do rogue states share certain common characteristics? If so, what should be done to curtail rogue states? How can rogue states be encouraged to behave less roguishly?

A far-ranging World Peace Foundation project on rogue states concluded that nation-states qualify as rogue states when and if they rank very high on two scales: repression and aggression. Those nation-states that systematically oppress their own people, deny human rights and civil liberties, severely truncate political freedom, and prevent meaningful individual economic opportunity, are easy to stigmatize. When they also starve their own people, the designation of a nation-state as a serial repressor comes readily.

Along the axis of aggression, many (but not all) of the most repressive nation-states in the world also rate high. If a nation-state possesses weapons of mass destruction, or seeks to attain WMD, they threaten world order and are by definition aggressive. Sponsors of terrorism are obviously aggressive. Lower down on the same scale are nation-states that attack or threaten their neighbors militarily. Then there are those nation-states that traffic in narcotics, launder illicit funds, ship small arms illegally, interfere with the free trade of their neighbors, or otherwise behave boorishly in their sub-regions. Those nation-states, even without the taint of terror or WMD, may destabilize or poison their regional political or economic environments.

A very few repressive states are only dangerous to themselves. That is, their ruling classes prey only on their citizens, and only occasionally reach out across national borders. But no super aggressive, or even regularly aggressive, nation-state does not attack its own people in a seriously kleptocratic or oppressive manner.

There is a cluster of nation-states, in other words, that pose continuing threats to their own inhabitants and to stability and peace in the world. Those are the rogue states. Or, to use language that is less emotive, those are the nation-states suffering

from acute repressive-aggressive disorder. Nation-states with that malady pose unacceptable risks to world order – to peace in our time.

The World Peace Foundation rogue states project is refining its criteria for repression and aggression. For now, the most repressive states in the world, listed alphabetically, are deemed to be: Belarus, Burma, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Togo, Turkmenistan, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe. The project intends to rank order those nation-states (and others to be added, with some possibly subtracted) according to quantitative assessments being constructed.

Likewise, among those dangerous states, North Korea and Iran rank at the highest pole of aggression. Syria follows. Then there is a grouping of less threatening but still aggressive states such as Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe. Belarus, Burma, Equatorial Guinea, Togo, Tunisia, and Turkmenistan threaten their own nationals much more than they currently undermine world order. Even if one or more of this last group may harbor a terrorist cell, or engage in drug trafficking or money laundering, the scale of such operations so far is limited and not beyond “yellow” in terms of any world order alert. The first three aggressive states above, however, are much more hostile, as are the three who follow, especially in their own neighborhoods.

There are a few other nation-states that are or have been aggressive, but may not necessarily oppress their own people harshly. Further investigation may add new names to the lists above. Moreover, the project knows that other nation-states are repressive, possibly in some cases even more repressive than some of the nation-states singled out for obloquy in this Policy Brief. The Foundation project intends to develop tougher and more thorough quantitative criteria to distinguish degrees of repression and degrees of aggression in today’s world.

Given a responsibility to protect the weak and the preyed upon in countries like those listed here, Washington and the United Nations both need to craft new policies to intervene diplomatically or otherwise before the next Rwandas and Darfurs occur. Bright lines of behavior need to be established across which repressive states step at their peril. Being a repressive state is in its own way a decisive threat to a peaceful world in addition to being an intolerable burden on a country’s own inhabitants.

There are established policies regarding the most aggressive WMD and terror threats. Less so are there well-crafted policies to curb exporters of enmity, crime, drugs, weapons, and so on. But if there are nation-states that deserve to be called rogues, so there must be policies that Washington, Brussels, and Moscow can devise to reduce the destabilizing threats posed by the real rogue states of the world. The World Peace Foundation will develop appropriate policy options in collaboration with a range of academic, diplomatic, intelligence, and military experts.