

The United States Is at It Again: Compiling an “Enemies List”. “A Wolf Pack of Rogue States”

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Many American still long for the good old days when men were still manly and President George W. Bush was able to announce that there was a “new sheriff in town” pledged to wipe terrorism from the face of the earth. “You’re either with us or against us,” he growled and he backed up his warning of lethal retribution with an enemies list that he called the “axis of evil.”

The axis of evil identified in those days in the [2002 State of the Union Address](#) consisted of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Iraq, which had not yet been invaded and conquered by the American war machine, was number one on the list, with Saddam allegedly brandishing weapons of mass destruction deliverable by the feared transatlantic gliders that could easily strike the United States. Bush explained that “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections, then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.”

North Korea meanwhile was described as “A regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens” while Iran “aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom.”

The phrase “axis of evil” proved so enticing that Undersecretary of State John Bolton used it two months later [in a speech](#) entitled “Beyond the Axis of Evil.” He included three more countries – Cuba, Libya and Syria because they were “state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or who have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or have the capability to do so in violation of their treaty obligations.” The nice thing about an Axis of Evil List is that you can make up the criteria as you go along so you can always add more evildoers.

Iraq was removed from the playing field in March 2003 while Libya had to wait for President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to be dealt with, but North Korea, Cuba, Syria and Iran are still around. Nevertheless, the idea of an enemies list continues to intrigue policy makers since it would be impossible to maintain the crippling burden of the military industrial complex without a simple expression that would convey to the public that there were bad actors out there waiting to pounce but for the magnificent efforts being made by Boeing, Lockheed, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics and Raytheon to defend freedom.

The Administration of President Donald Trump, not to be outdone by its predecessors, has recently come up with two enemies lists. The first one was coined by the irrepressible John Bolton, who is now National Security Adviser. He has come up with the “troika of tyranny” to describe Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, [where he sees](#) “...the dangers of poisonous ideologies without control, and the dangers of domination and suppression... I am here to convey a clear message from the President of the United States about our policy towards these three regimes. Under this administration, we will no longer appease the dictators and despots near our coasts in this hemisphere. The troika of tyranny in this hemisphere — Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua — has finally found its rival.”

Bolton also demonstrated that he has [a light touch](#), adding

“These tyrants fancy themselves strongmen and revolutionaries, icons and luminaries. In reality, they are clownish, pitiful figures more akin to Larry, Curly, and Moe. The three stooges of socialism are true believers, but they worship a false God.”

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has apparently also been looking at Venezuela and not liking what he is seeing. On his recent road trip to the Middle East [he told reporters](#) that

“It is time to begin the orderly transition to a new government [in Caracas].”

He declared that

“The Maduro regime is illegitimate and the United States will work diligently to restore a real democracy to that country. We are very hopeful we can be a force for good to allow the region to come together to deliver that.”

“Force for good” is another key soundbite used by Pompeo. In his Cairo speech on January 10th, he described the United States as a “force for good” in the entire Middle East.

Bolton might have thought “troika of tyranny” was a hands down winner, but he was actually upstaged by the dour Vice President Mike Pence [who declared](#) to a gathering of US Ambassadors that

“Beyond our global competitors, the United States faces a ‘wolf pack of rogue states.’ No shared ideology or objective unites our competitors and adversaries except this one: They seek to overturn the international order that the United States has upheld for more than half a century.”

The states Pence identified were North Korea, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. Of the five, only North Korea can even plausibly be considered as a possible threat to the United States.

As wolves are actually very social animals the metaphor provided by Pence does not hold together very well. But Pence, Bolton and Pompeo are all talking about the same thing, which is the continued existence of some governments that are reluctant to fall in line with Washington’s demands. They have to be banished from polite discourse by declaring them

“rogue” or “tyrannical” or “evil.” Other nations with far worse human rights records – to include Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Israel and Egypt – are given a pass as long as they stay aligned with the US on policy.

So useful “lists” are all about what Washington wants the world to believe about itself and its adversaries. Put competitors on a list and condemn them to eternal denigration whenever their names come up. And, as Pence observes, it is all done to prevent the overturning of the “international order.” However, his is a curious conceit as it is the United States and some of its allies, through their repeated and illegal interventions in foreign countries, that have established something like international disorder. Who is really doing what to whom is pretty much dependent on which side of the fence one is standing on.

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