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The Securitization of Rogue States in the US

The rogue states narrative has been an important continuity in US post-Cold War security discourse, but it specifically appeared in two principal contexts. First, it was used in the context of reflections on US grand strategy, constructing a new ‘international order’ for a perceived new strategic era and discussing the role, scope and purpose of the US in this new environment. John Dumbrell (2012: 82–83) argues that at this level of the discourse ‘long-standing arguments about the relationship between ideals and interests in US foreign policy were transformed and re-energized’, with several US elites searching for ‘a new way of grounding [America’s] internationalist engagement’ in the post-Cold War environment. Second, this broader debate occasionally merged with a more specific debate on a new principal weapons of mass destruction (WMD) scenario, a ‘second nuclear age’ after the end of the Cold War, marked specifically by the threat of horizontal proliferation to hostile Third World powers. In this context, particularly after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and more strongly towards the end of the 1990s, the rogue states narrative was used as part of an argument for replacing traditional methods of arms control, using arms control regimes and non-proliferation treaties including the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), by more ‘pro-active’ strategies of counterproliferation, preemptive strikes and regime change as well as ballistic missile defence. After 9/11, the rogue states narrative was then also linked with the problem of international terrorism, giving the diffuse ‘war on terror’ a more state-centric frame and increasing the threat potential of terrorism by combining it with the danger of nuclear weapons handed over to terrorist groups by ‘rogue states’. At the level of grand strategy, these latter developments were eventually reflected in a strong focus on the
concept of *regime change*, which corresponded with the emergence of neoconservative thinking within Republican conservativism. The rogue states narrative within US security discourse thus combines reflections on post-Cold War grand strategy, proliferation/counterproliferation and, eventually the emergence of neoconservative thinking in US foreign and security policy. This chapter starts with a reflection on the diffuse origins of the concept and terminology of ‘rogue states’ before turning to a reconstruction of post-Cold War US security narratives with regard to rogue states and a closer examination of the specific language of securitizing moves that was used.

**Origins of the rogue states narrative**

From an English School perspective (see Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2004; Dunne, 1998; Linklater and Suganami, 2006; see also Henriksen, 2001), the rogue states narrative simply articulates a ‘new name’ for an arguably decades-old structural problem of isolation, revisionism and/or revolutionism in international society. There have always been states ‘outside’ an existing international order or states that constitute more or less radical challengers to an international status quo, to its dominant fundamental values, its main powers, patterns of influence and/or existing geographical demarcations. From such a perspective, the rogue states narrative frames these general structural problems of international society in a distinctly American language marked by a moralist rhetoric embedded in American exceptionalism and the ‘American civil religion’, and it thereby gives a great variety of perceived security problems a unitary interpretive frame.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a *rogue* as (1) a dishonest or unprincipled man; (2) a mischievous but likeable person; (3) an elephant or other large wild animal with destructive tendencies driven away or living apart from the herd; (4) a person or thing that is defective or unpredictable. Likewise, as Senn (2009: 13) argues, related terms such as *outlaw, pariah* or *renegade* ‘refer to a state of being an outsider to a group and a violator of certain principles or norms’.

In 1971, Yehezkel Dror analysed the threats originating from *crazy states*, which he defined as irregular actors not abiding by international norms, which therefore should not be allowed to acquire WMD:

> Aggressive religious movements such as the Christian Crusaders or the Islam Holy Warriors; anarchists after the First World War and before it; contemporary terrorist groups in the United States, in