

Engage, Isolate, or Attack: Explaining U.S. Foreign Policy toward Rogue States

Dissertation Proposal

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Introduction

Why does the U.S. isolate certain states while choosing policies of constructive engagement with others when attempting to compel better behavior? This dissertation project attempts to explain discordant American foreign policy toward so-called “rogue states” or “states of concern.”¹ American foreign policy toward rogues has been highly variable. Certain rogue states are engaged diplomatically and offered material incentives to alter their behavior (e.g. the Agreed Framework deal with North Korea in 1994), while other states who exhibit similar behavior are contained, isolated diplomatically, and sanctioned as with the policy of “dual containment” of Iran and Iraq in the mid-1990s. Policies of isolation and sanctioning, however, have mostly proved ineffectual in significantly altering states’ behaviors and such policies are sometimes counterproductive as they can further strain relations between the target state and the isolating state(s) applying sanctions. Further, as an extensive literature has demonstrated, unilateral sanctions rarely achieve desirable outcomes because they are not financially constraining enough to alter state behavior.²

At the same time policies of isolation provide space for rogue states to continue undesirable behavior such as support for terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Thus, isolation may allow the level of threat (or perceived threat because of uncertainty) to increase and U.S. security to decrease. For example, after taking office in 2000 and reversing previous policies of engagement, the Bush administration expressed extreme trepidation over the disposition of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

¹ The U.S. State Department abandoned official use of the term “rogue state” in 2000 in favor of the phrase “states of concern.” I use the term “rogue state” to refer to both outlaw states, which reject international norms and practices, and revisionist and expansionist states whose efforts to alter the status quo is viewed as threatening by the United States. As such “rogue” is simply an imprecise appellation. I am not concerned with *why* this label is applied, only with policymaking toward states that fit into this category. In this regard, see Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 1993), 48-49.

² The U.S. embargo of and sanction against Cuba, in place since 1959, may be the best example of the long term failure of such policies to bring about political change.

But despite the negative consequences, isolationist policies are many times continued despite considerable evidence that they are ineffective. For example, the United States has not had diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979 and has since then enforced a range of economic sanctions on that country. Yet Iran still continues its material support for groups the United States considers terrorist organizations and Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs have steadily grown even under economic sanctions.

This project employs decisionmaking and foreign policy theories to illuminate how U.S. decisionmakers have formulated policies toward this specific sub-group of states that have represented security concerns for the United States. Of central importance is how and why different strategies are chosen or rejected; why suboptimal policies are sometimes selected; and why failed policies are continued. I integrate systemic theories of international politics with mid-range theories of foreign policy decision-making to help answer the research questions of this project. Such a supplementation of structural theories is necessary for better explanatory power. Parsimonious, "billiard ball" theories of international politics (such as neorealism) purport to help us understand and predict the external behavior of large states and great powers like the United States. According to these theories, states are the primary actors in international relations and act based on calculations of the balance of power.³ The balance of power and states' behaviors based on their assessment of it "is mainly influenced by their external environment, *not* by their internal characteristics."⁴ However, the tenets of realist theories of international relations do not offer adequate explanation for U.S. foreign policy toward rogue states – states whose behavior has the potential to alter the external security environment in a negative way for the United States. As James Fearon puts it, systemic

³ Stephen Walt argues that states balance against *threats* rather than "against power alone." See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 5.

⁴ John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 17.

theories do not explain why “a state chooses bad or foolish foreign policies.”⁵ These theories do not tell us why the U.S. does not balance against some threats. That is, they do not tell us why the United States often pursues suboptimal policies with regards to some states. By suboptimal, I mean policies designed to address certain security concerns on the part of the U.S., but by their very nature are an inefficient response to a threat or ignore potential changes in the balance of power. Domestic-political approaches help explain foreign policy choices, especially choices that are suboptimal, and how failed policies achieve path dependence.⁶

Theories of foreign policy and decision-making are better equipped to explain *individual* U.S. policies. Theories that open the “black box” of the state offer more explanatory power than systemic theories. A theory of foreign policy helps explain the goals, strategies, and preferences of individual states. James Fearon writes that “a theory of foreign policy is a theory of why particular states make particular foreign policy moves at particular times.”⁷ By contrast theories of international politics explain international events and aggregate state behavior.⁸ A theory of foreign policy “makes determinate predictions for dependent variable(s) that measure the behavior of individual states.”⁹ To best understand how and why certain policies choices have been made with regard to rogue states, an approach that bridges the gap between systemic theories and decisionmaking paradigms is appropriate.

This project integrates the poliheuristic theory of decision-making with neoclassical realism to explain U.S. foreign policy and decision-making toward rogue states.¹⁰ Poliheuristic theory employs cognitive and rational choice approaches to explain how leaders and elites make decisions.

⁵ James Fearon, “Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1998, 291.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 295.

⁸ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14.

⁹ Colin Elman, “Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?” *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, 12.

¹⁰ It should be noted that despite its name, neoclassical realism is not a systemic theory.

The theory posits that decision-makers use a two-stage process to select a course of action. The first stage uses cognitive heuristics and is a process of “rejecting alternatives that are unacceptable to the policy maker on a critical dimension or dimensions.”¹¹ The unacceptability of certain policy alternatives cannot be “compensated” for by other alternatives that score positively on other critical dimensions. In the second stage, the decisionmaker “selects an alternative from the subset of remaining alternatives while maximizing benefits and minimizing risks.”¹²

Neoclassical realism “posits that systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables to produce foreign policy behaviors.”¹³ This emerging approach recognizes that states “react differently to similar systemic pressures” in part because domestic-level pressures have a profound influence on foreign policies, especially on how leaders view external threats. I locate the poliheuristic approach within the neoclassical realist framework.

I hypothesize that during the initial stage of agenda-setting and decision-making, domestic-level variables such as bureaucratic and domestic politics, ideology, and analogies of appeasement have been critical in narrowing decision choices and ultimately determining how an administration deals with a rogue state, particularly the decision to isolate. I argue that these variables rather than systemic pressures and changes in the external security environment better explain foreign policies especially those that result in suboptimal outcomes.

Scope of the Problem/Motivating the Puzzle

I contend that the United States has at times pursued suboptimal isolationist policies toward rogue states that *reduce* its security. Systemic, rationalist theories of international politics would suggest the opposite. That is states, particularly great powers, should pursue policies that maintain

¹¹ Alex Mintz, “How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48 No. 1, February 2004.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Randall Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2004), 164. For a review of the emerging literature on neoclassical realism see Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998).

the status quo or increase relative power. But this has not always been the case with regards to U.S. policymaking and some outlaw states. While some states are isolated in efforts to contain them others have been constructively engaged precisely to eliminate or reduce security threats. What accounts for the paradoxical behavior?

For example, during the 1990s the Clinton administration brokered a deal with North Korea to freeze its nuclear program and work toward restoration of diplomatic relations. Yet when the Bush administration came to power in 2001, it abandoned the deal and pursued isolationist policies. This prompted North Korea to withdraw from the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), expel IAEA inspectors, and proceed to reprocess spent nuclear fuel thereby increasing its arsenal of nuclear weapons from one or two to possibly half a dozen or more. Why was this policy of isolation that decreased American relative power and security chosen?

While the Bush administration rejected the Clinton policy of engagement of North Korea, it announced with much fanfare that it had concluded a secret deal in which Libya would forego its WMD programs in exchange for normalized relations with the United States and Britain. Though over a decade of sanctions apparently influenced Libya's willingness to capitulate to British and American demands, a line had to be crossed to enter into negotiations with an outlaw regime – a line not readily crossed in other instances.¹⁴ Why then was Libya offered such a deal yet North Korea was not?

Since the Iranian revolution and subsequent hostage crisis, Iran has been isolated by the United States. Outlaw behavior such as support for terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction are cited as principle reasons for this policy. Yet the United States continued to buy Iranian oil until 1996. Why did the U.S. continue to provide financial support for a state it

¹⁴ Some officials in the Bush administration have sought to portray Libya's willingness to abjure WMD as a consequence of American power projection during the initial stages of the war in Iraq. However, negotiations to normalize relations began during the Clinton administration. In this regard, see Bruce Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who Won Libya," *International Security*, Vol. 30 no. 3, Winter 2005-2006.

considered an outlaw? Alternatively, if the U.S. was not opposed to this arrangement, why did it not pursue better relations with Iran? In 2003, high-level officials in the Iranian government reached out to the Bush administration in an effort to improve relations between the two countries. The Iranians offered to talk frankly about all concerns the Americans had Iranian behavior. The offer, however, was rebuffed outright by the White House. After surprising revelations in 2002 about the advanced state of Iran's nuclear program, why did an administration reject an offer to improve relations with a potential security risk? This project begins with these puzzles and seeks to uncover the critical decisionmaking factors that produced these variable outcomes.

Research Questions

The United States has pursued variable foreign policy strategies toward rogue states. Some have been engaged in efforts to moderate their behavior as with Syria or North Korea during the Clinton administration. Alternatively different administrations have pursued policies of isolation deeming the undesirable behavior of rogue states as an insurmountable obstacle to U.S. engagement. In an extreme case, the United States went to war with Iraq (2003) to force a change of regime.

The research questions guiding this project are:

- (1) What variables have determined U.S. policy toward rogue states over the past 25 years?*
- (2) Why are some states engaged while others are isolated and allowed to continue behavior that negatively affects the security environment?*
- (3) Why does the U.S. maintain policies of isolation and containment when such policies fail to achieve desirable outcomes?*
- (4) Why are successful past episodes of engagement often ignored or disregarded? If policies of isolation of rogue states are chosen because of those states' behaviors, why are other states who exhibit similar behavior engaged (Pakistan and Syria for example)? What accounts for inconsistent foreign policies toward rogues?*

The synoptic question this project seeks to answer is when and why does the United States choose engagement a foreign policy tool and when does it prefer isolation when dealing with rogue states? For example, despite mounting evidence that Iran is very close to mastering the nuclear fuel cycle – which would enable it to enrich uranium for a civilian nuclear power program *or* nuclear weapons – the United States has refused to engage diplomatically with that country, despite Iranian overtures. Paradoxically (it would seem), the United States and Britain offered Libya economic incentives and restored diplomatic relations in return for that country accepting responsibility for past terrorist activity and abandoning its weapons of mass destruction programs.¹⁵

Research Context and Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework of this project is informed by poliheuristic theory and neoclassical realism – particularly Randall Schweller’s conception of underbalancing – applied to empirical research to demonstrate how different variables affect foreign policy outcomes.¹⁶ This approach is based on recognition that understanding state behavior and foreign policies of individual states is most effectively done using an approach that employs a framework that integrates domestic-level and systemic variables to explain decision-makers’ behavior and subsequent foreign policy outcomes. The poliheuristic theory of decision making helps illuminate the decisionmaking *process* by explaining *how* decisionmakers make foreign policy choices (by excluding certain alternatives according various cognitive) while neoclassical realism frames this process as function of systemic factors filtered through domestic-level variables.

The approach of this project recognizes that foreign policy decisions taken by U.S. administrations are not always made in accordance with what rational choice-expected utility models would predict – that is suboptimal foreign policies are often chosen. Additionally, when confronted

¹⁵ I concede that there is still much that is not known about the Libyan episode.

¹⁶ Schweller defines underbalancing as a state’s inefficient response to a dangerous aggressor when the state’s efforts are essential to deter or defeat it. Schweller, 168.

with similar situations and crises, actors often take divergent paths. This project employs an integrated approach to examine cases of foreign policy toward rogue states covering four U.S. presidential administrations. Within the neoclassical realist framework, several decisionmaking models and theories are employed to explain U.S. behavior and policy decisions, including the rational actor model, operational code, bureaucratic politics, analogical reasoning, and domestic politics.¹⁷ These approaches are synthesized under the first (noncompensatory) stage of decisionmaking of the poliheuristic approach.

Structural or neorealist theories of international relations are inadequate for explaining foreign policy decision-making and provide an *incomplete* picture how certain foreign policy outcomes are determined. Realist theories are ineffective in explaining varying U.S. policies toward revisionist states particularly in accounting for anomalous American policymaking. As Thomas Risse has written “structural theories of international relations need to be *complemented* by approaches that integrate domestic politics, transnational relations, and the role of ideas...”¹⁸ Realism and other rational choice theories posit that actors behave consistently and seek to maximize value in their choice of actions and policies. Graham Allison’s conception of the rational actor model presents a government or state which makes policy choices to achieve strategic goals. The choice maximizes value – that is the “alternative whose consequences rank highest in terms of...goals and objectives” is the one chosen.¹⁹ Rationality “refers to consistent value-maximizing choice within specified

¹⁷ See especially Steve A. Yetiv, *Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-making and the Persian Gulf War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). Two other works that are relevant in this regard are Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow’s revised (1999) *Essence of Decision* and Deborah Larson’s *Origins of Containment*. The idea of an integrated approach that employs multiple analytical approaches to the same case is borrowed from Yetiv’s book.

¹⁸ Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War,” *International Organization* 48 (Spring 1994) Emphasis added. Although Risse-Kappen is specifically referring to the “recent sea change in world politics” I find his comment appropriate here as well.

¹⁹ Graham Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *American Political Science Review*, September 1969, 63.

constraints.”²⁰ Value maximizing behavior examines “values and objectives” against different courses of action. The consequences of each course of action are estimated and action which minimizes costs is chosen. Generally, a course of action is chosen that protects a state’s national interest. In part, this project attempts to explain policies that ostensibly do not protect the national interest and allow adversaries to gain relative power. Neoclassical realism helps bridge the gap between traditional realist theories and theories of foreign policy decisionmaking that privilege domestic-level variables.

Poliheuristic theory focuses on both the how and why decisionmakers act in deliberative processes. It is an approach which *integrates* cognitive maps with rational choice approaches. The theory posits that decisionmakers use a two-stage process to select a course of action. The first stage uses cognitive heuristics and is a process of “rejecting alternatives that are unacceptable to the policy maker on a critical dimension or dimensions.”²¹ The first stage simplifies the decision task. As decisionmakers consider policy alternatives, “[i]f certain alternatives score low on a given dimension, a high score on another dimension cannot ‘compensate’ for it and hence the alternative is rejected.”²² For example, in 1992 the George H.W. Bush administration completed a review of U.S. policy toward Iran. The review concluded that a policy of constructive engagement was in the best interest for the United States. However, the White House rejected this alternative as being politically untenable and continued with the status quo.

During the noncompensatory stage, several, different variables are likely critical in narrowing decision choices (see Table 1).²³

²⁰ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (NY: Addison Wesley, 1999), 18.

²¹ Mintz, “How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective.”

²² Alex Mintz, “The decision to Attack Iraq: A Noncompensatory Theory of Decision Making,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37 No. 4, (Dec. 1993), 595.

²³ At this stage the noncompensatory factors are obviously somewhat speculative.

Table 1. Decision to Isolate – Determinative Noncompensatory Factors

Iran	Iraq	North Korea	Libya
1979 – 1988 Hostage crisis legacy	1984 - 1990 Engagement	Compensatory	1980s Compensatory
1988 – 1992 Domestic politics	1991 Militarized conflict	1993 – 2000 Engagement	1990s Appeasement metaphor Domestic politics
1992 – 1996 Domestic politics Hostage crisis legacy	1992 – 1998 Ideology Domestic politics	2000 – 2003 Ideology ?	1999 – 2002 Quiet engagement
2000 – 2004 Ideology Hostage crisis legacy	2000 – 2003 Militarized conflict ?	2003 – Present Engagement	2002 - 2006 Engagement

The second stage of the decision-making process employs rational choice calculations in which the decision-maker selects a course of action or policy from the remaining alternatives that maximizes benefits while minimizing risks. One key premise of poliheuristic theory is the decisionmakers will employ *multiple* strategies in formulating a policy, including those which are suboptimal.²⁴ Additionally the first stage heuristic is often to “avoid major political loss.”²⁵ Relevant examples of suboptimal decision strategies are also those in which the preferred strategy or course of action by a leader or decision-maker is rejected because of public opinion or perceptions that a particular policy or course of action will be politically damaging.

While poliheuristic theory helps elucidate the decision calculus, neoclassical realism provides a broader theoretical framework that identifies specific variables that influence statecraft. Schweller’s conception of a neoclassical realist theory of “underbalancing” helps explain why some states underreact to external threats or changes in the systemic structure. According this theory, statecraft is a function not only of “geostrategic risks” but also of four variables: (1) elite preferences and perceptions of the external security environment; (2) which elites’ preference and perceptions matter

²⁴ Mintz, “How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective.”

²⁵ Alex Mintz, “Applied Decision Analysis: Utilizing Poliheuristic Theory to Explain and Predict Foreign policy and National Security Decisions,” *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 6, 2005, 94.

in the policymaking process; (3) the domestic political risks associated with certain foreign policy choices; and (4) the variable risk-taking propensities of national elites.²⁶ I contend that U.S. policy toward rogue states has at times in specific cases, under-reacted to potential threats by isolating states that exhibit threatening behavior. In this project the neoclassical realist framework provides the broad context in which poliheuristic theory illuminates the underlying decisionmaking mechanisms.

A Brief Review of the Literature

Few authors have attempted to use methods of foreign policy analysis to *comparatively* analyze U.S. policy toward rogue states.²⁷ Some single case studies chronicle the events surrounding policymaking toward specific countries. Leon Sigal argues that U.S. policy toward North Korea during the Clinton administration was driven in large part by an unwillingness to cooperate and a preference for coercion that was a result of drawing fallacious conclusions from Cold War episodes like the Cuban missile crisis.²⁸ Along these lines Stephen Rock has analyzed how an ingrained psychology and fear of comparisons to Chamberlain's failed attempt of appeasement of Hitler at Munich continues to make conciliatory policy options appear unfavorable for decisionmakers.²⁹ Marian Paules contends that U.S.-Iranian relations have remained strained because of the American foreign policy establishment's inability to define a "dominant American identity narrative" that comes to terms with the Iranian hostage crisis – a humiliating episode in American history for many current and former members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.³⁰ Kenneth Pollack similarly argues that during the Iran-Iraq war and even after the end of the Cold War, there was a sense

²⁶ Schweller, 169.

²⁷ Alexander George notes similarly that there are no comparative studies that analyze what strategies are available for dealing with rogue states and what has been tried in the past. See George, *Bridging the Gap*.

²⁸ Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Stephen R. Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

³⁰ Marian H. Paules, *United States Relations with Iran: American Identity, Foreign Policy and the Politics of Representation*, (PhD diss, Syracuse University, 2003).

among American policymakers that Iran simply did not matter. Pollack contends that failure to define strategic goals vis-à-vis Iran was due in large part to the legacy of the revolution and hostage crisis.³¹ Pollack's book is one of the few that examines U.S.-Iranian relations *after* the Cold War.

There is a considerable body of literature dealing with the U.S. decision to expel Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, including a study that uses poliheuristic theory.³² Alex Mintz's analysis of the U.S. decision to expel Iraq from Kuwait by force finds that both the political and military dimensions were critical in the decision to use force. George H.W. Bush eliminated options of continued sanctions and containment because they were politically unsatisfactory. Bush was fearful that a prolonged episode of containment and diplomatic pressure would leave him politically vulnerable, especially as the American economy faced a recession. This coupled with analyses from top Air Force advisers convincing the president of the overwhelming air superiority of U.S. forces helped shape the decision to use force.

Little has been written about U.S.-Iraq policy from 1992 – present, however. The U.S. decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003 has been detailed in a few non-academic works, but has not been the subject of scholarly analysis.³³ The case of Libya since the Lockerbie bombing and its decision to forego weapons of mass destruction and pursue better relations with the West has also received little attention.

Few studies exist that attempt to analyze U.S. policy toward rogue states comparatively. The best comparative analysis done on the subject of rogues states and U.S. foreign policy is by Robert Litwak who examines how the “rogue” designation frames U.S. policy toward those states. Litwak's

³¹ Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between America and Iran* (New York: Random House, 2004).

³² Alex Mintz, “The decision to Attack Iraq: A Noncompensatory Theory of Decision Making,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37 No. 4, (Dec. 1993).

³³ I concede that it may be too soon to obtain accurate information from policymakers who had direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the decision to go to war.

conclusion is that the “rogue state designation...significantly distorts policy-making.”³⁴ Policymakers construct a false dichotomy in which the available policy choices are *only* engagement or containment. Policymakers find themselves locked into this dichotomy, unable to fashion foreign policy from a “continuum” of choices. Litwak’s study chronicles this dynamic in cases of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.³⁵ However, he does not attempt to answer the question of *why* this dynamic persists or is seen as favorable and productive by policymakers and why failed policies are continued. Additionally, Litwak’s study predates the 2003 war in Iraq, the breakdown of the U.S.-North Korean dialogue, the restoration of diplomatic relations with Libya, and the revelations of Iran’s significantly advanced nuclear weapons program among other more recent events. This dissertation project seeks to answer those questions through an analysis of the historical record and interviews with policymakers in the U.S. foreign policy establishment. This study will fill the gap in comparative studies of U.S. foreign policies toward rogue states and contribute the growing literature on domestic politics and theories of foreign policy.

Methodology

This project will use Alexander George’s method of structured, focused comparison. The research objective is to identify causal mechanisms and variables that explain why certain foreign policy paths are taken in some cases and different policies are favored in other, similar cases. The dependent variable is the decision to engage, isolate, or take military action against a rogue state. The independent variables encompass determinative factors that have produced divergent outcomes.

Case Selection

There are only a few cases of states completely isolated by the United States – that is those with whom the U.S. has no diplomatic relations and are the targets of sanctions or other punitive

³⁴ Robert S. Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Litwak excludes Libya in his study because in his estimation it did not represent a similar level of threat and was not situated in as strategically important location as Iran and Iraq.

measures.³⁶ While the White House and the U.S. State Department frequently express displeasure at the foreign and domestic policies of other states, few cases rise to the level of total exclusion from relations with the United States. Behavior characterized as antithetical to U.S. interests domestically or internationally can generally be categorized as security-related issues such as sponsorship of terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, geopolitical issues such provocation of regional instability and sponsorship of terrorism, and normative issues such as suppression of democracy movements, violations of human rights, and authoritarianism.

The cases countries for this project have been selected because the decision whether to engage or isolate has a direct impact on U.S. security. As such cases of states who espouse and promote or exemplify policies that are only antithetical to American *values* are excluded (e.g. Cuba or Burma).³⁷ One goal of this project is to explain why suboptimal foreign policies are chosen. I concentrate on those policies which decrease or have the potential to decrease U.S. security. Arbitrary or contradictory policies toward states that have no potential to affect the prevailing security environment are thus excluded. For example according the U.S. State Department

[T]he United States employs a wide range of diplomatic, informational, and economic tools to advance its foreign policy objectives...For governments that have shown the will to reform, the United States offers financial, technical and political assistance to their efforts. For governments that lack the will to reform...the United States can withhold support for, or suspend such assistance when a country fails to take sufficient steps to achieve progress in its human rights practices...The timing and selection of the tools' used are tailored to each situation. We choose the tool or combination of tools that we believe will best advance the President's foreign policy goals.³⁸

States that hold significant geopolitical interests for the U.S., however, are routinely excluded from serious scrutiny of internal and sometimes external behavior. A case in point is Egypt, a country rated as “not free” by Freedom House’s ranking of independent countries. Egypt, a nondemocratic

³⁶ The only sovereign states with which the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations are Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Somalia. This does not include disputed territories and those with unresolved legal status such as Western Sahara and Taiwan.

³⁷ It should be noted that the U.S. has diplomatic relations with Burma.

³⁸ U.S. State Department, “Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004 – 2005,” available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/shrd/2004/43106.htm>.

country with a poor record of human rights, is the third largest recipient of U.S. aid after Iraq and Israel.³⁹ But given Egypt's strategic importance in the Middle East region, both as an Arab ally with friendly relations with Israel and provider of access to the Suez Canal, the U.S. stance toward this authoritarian regime – which contradicts stated policy – is easily explained. States whose behaviors mirror those of rogue states, but represent significant geopolitical interests for the U.S. are therefore excluded.

Along these lines I also exclude cases in which U.S. policy toward a state has been mostly consistent over a long period of time because altering the status quo seems unlikely, even if actual policy has at times been incongruous with stated U.S. policy. This rationale then excludes the cases of Pakistan (a nuclear weapons state outside the NPT and nonproliferation regime and U.S. ally); China, a nuclear weapon state inside the NPT framework but perennial violator of human rights; and Syria, an accused sponsor of terrorism and suspected proliferant of chemical weapons, but an Arab state which has come close to normalizing relations with Israel.⁴⁰

This project is about explaining anomalous behavior rather than a single outcome. Because the cases represent episodes of isolation, constructive engagement, and other outcomes such as militarized conflict, the selection of cases avoids dependent variable selection bias (and truncation). The cases are variable time periods of U.S. relations with the four countries being considered. The variable time periods represent variation both on the outcome across the countries and within the same country.

³⁹ Though Egypt recently held contested presidential elections, the largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, was excluded.

⁴⁰ One could argue that this criterion then should exclude Iran. However, Iran was considered by various U.S. administrations to pose an *existential* threat to the U.S. interests (unlike China or Pakistan). Additionally, as this project seeks to illustrate, several opportunities to alter the status quo in a favorable manner were missed or rejected.

The cases

The cases are chosen from the small subset of what can be considered rogue states according to their potential (actual or perceived) to impact U.S. interests. The classification of a country as a “rogue state” is a post-Cold War construction that has seemingly replaced pariah state as a category of outlaw regimes that exhibit behavior antithetical to U.S. interests. The rogue category has included states that allegedly sponsor terrorism, oppose the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and develop weapons of mass destruction. States fitting the rogue criteria in one way or another at various times are numerous including Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, and Syria. The term “rogue state” has most resonance and has been used by American policymakers, pundits, and politicians most often to refer to those which sponsor terrorism and develop weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons. The number of states who have active chemical weapons programs and *serious* nuclear weapons programs is very small. Only six countries appear on the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism (Iraq was removed in 2003).⁴¹ Of those six, only four have or had significant WMD programs. In essence, the cases selected represent the entire universe of rogue states as defined in this project.

Four countries will be considered with the individual cases representing specific U.S. administrations’ dealing with them. The cases are: Iran (1979-2004); Libya (1984-2000; 2000-2004); Iraq (1979-1990; 1990-2003); North Korea (1988-2000; 2000-2004). These countries were chosen because they have or for significant periods of time had no diplomatic relations with the United States; appear or have appeared on the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism; have or had significant programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, outside of or in violation of international treaties or regimes; and have been targeted by the United States for resocialization into the normative framework of the international community. There is

⁴¹ The countries are Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and Sudan.

variance on the dependent variable as the cases represent episodes of both engagement and isolation broadly defined, and instances of militarized conflict (see Table 2).

Table 2. U.S. Policy toward Rogue States

Time period*	North Korea	Iraq	Iran	Libya
Pre-1979	Isolate	Limited isolation	U.S. ally	Isolate
1979-1980s	Isolate	Limited engagement	Isolate with exceptions	Isolate
Late 1980s	Quiet diplomacy	Engage	Isolate Overtures	Isolate Attack
1992-1996	Agreed Framework	Dual Containment	Dual containment	Isolate
1996-2000	Engage	Sanction-Isolate	Quiet diplomacy Overtures	Isolate Quiet diplomacy
2000-2004	Isolate Axis of Evil Multilateral engagement	Axis of Evil Attack	Isolate Axis of Evil	Engage

*The time periods are approximate for presentation purposes

I have excluded the cases of China, Cuba, Pakistan, Syria, and Sudan for several reasons. In the case of China, the United States has had diplomatic relations with it for over 30 years and has significant economic dealings interests there. Additionally, China, a nuclear weapons state, is a signatory to both the NPT and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan has played an important regional role as an ally of the United States. And though the United States sanctioned Pakistan after its nuclear tests in 1998, Pakistan is not a signatory of the NPT or the CTBT. Pakistan has also been a quasi-democratic country for significant time periods over the past two decades. Cuba, Syria, and Sudan are excluded because they do not have significant WMD programs.⁴² Syria enjoys diplomatic relations with the United States and has since its independence. As was mentioned above, Syria's geopolitical import for the U.S. is

⁴² Syria has been mentioned as harboring nuclear weapons ambitions by such figures as John Bolton. However, there is no support for this allegation in the empirical record and such claims have been refuted by the CIA.

also undeniable. In the case of Cuba, U.S. isolation of this country is driven almost entirely by domestic politics.⁴³

Variables

Diplomatic or constructive engagement can take several forms and are concepts that “require specific content in order to become *strategies*.”⁴⁴ By the same token isolation/containment can take several forms. The principle and most important difference between the two is that one employs strategies bilaterally in cooperation with the target state while the other unilaterally attempts to alter behavior through nonengagement. The independent variables will be refined as research progresses. They are expected to include: threat perception of the U.S.; past history of relations with specific country; regime type; strength of the appeasement metaphor; and domestic politics. The aim of this project is not to focus on the outcome/dependent variable but on the importance of certain independent variables.

The dependent variable

This variable is the foreign policy taken toward a particular state as a result of rogue behavior. The state may be diplomatically engaged in hopes that direct relations will afford the opportunity to shape behavior over time in a way favorable to the United States. Alternatively, a state may be isolated diplomatically and/or economically. Diplomatic isolation may symbolically signal displeasure with state behavior. Economic isolation or sanctions attempt to alter undesirable behavior by restricting the financial means to engage in rogue behavior and inflict economic hardship on the populace in hopes that public pressure will mitigate rogue behavior.

⁴³ Cuba’s inclusion as a state sponsor of terrorism is also dubious and based mainly on involvement in the civil conflict in Colombia.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 91.

The independent variables

At this stage the variable affecting outcomes are only speculative and crude. They are likely to be both systemic and domestic-level variables though I hypothesize that domestic-level variable have a greater impact on outcomes than systemic, external ones.

Threat perception: How does the behavior of the state in question threaten U.S. security? Does the state pose an imminent or long-term existential threat to the U.S.? Does the state possess the capability to inflict damage to U.S. interests? The level of threat a state poses or is perceived to pose influence policy actions and outcomes. If a state is deemed to pose a more imminent threat, such as being on the verge of testing or deploying nuclear weapons, resultant policies may differ from those directed at states at earlier stages of weaponization.

Past history: Does the country have recent history of contentious relations or animosity with the U.S.? Have the states engaged in military conflict or skirmishes? Are there diplomatic relations between the two states? Past history may influence (in either direction) the willingness of the U.S. to engage with another state or the propensity to prefer policies of isolation. For example, the fact that the U.S. fought a war with Iraq in 1991 may have perpetuated an unwillingness to engage it during the 1990s and may have influenced the decisionmaking in the lead up to war in 2003.

Regime type: Does the type of regime (e.g. theocratic) affect U.S. willingness to pursue one strategy over another? Is the U.S. less willing to deal with an Islamic, theocratic regime than a secular totalitarian one? Anecdotally it appears that regimes that have strong ideological components whether religious or secular have affected the nature of some administrations' relations with certain states.

The appeasement metaphor: How do U.S. decision-makers and policymakers view engagement with the state in question? Is engaging or negotiating with the state viewed politically as a sign of weakness or appeasement (e.g. Reagan and Libya; George H.W. Bush and Iraq)?

Domestic politics: Is engagement politically untenable? Or is isolation a politically popular? Is the White House at odds with Congress over a strategy to deal with the rogue? This variable will have to be refined and likely expanded and disaggregated as the research unfolds. A number of political variables necessarily affect how certain policy options are viewed.

Geopolitics: Does the state have the ability or potential to positively or negatively affect U.S. interests in the region? It seems logical that geopolitical importance would make policies of engagement more favorable as it has for "problematic" countries like Syria and Pakistan. But there are puzzling cases in which the effect of geopolitics is unclear such as with Iran and North Korea.

Data Requirements and General Questions

The goal of this project is to illuminate the thinking and decisionmaking process of policymakers as they formulated policy toward a certain group of states. Systemic pressures, historical attitudes, and domestic-level factors all affect the policy process. Essential to understanding the decision process is knowing how foreign policy elites viewed the nature of the problem – that is their disposition toward the states in question – and what they *believed* were the

viable options open to them. Though the cases here represent episodes that have and had implications for U.S. security, variable courses of action were taken for each. In examining how policymakers developed certain strategies the questions explored in each case will seek to understand not how strategies affect outcomes, but why certain strategies are preferred over others. Through analysis of the empirical record and elite interviews, the following will be asked of each case in accordance with the method of structured focused comparison:⁴⁵

Strategic foreign policy questions

- What has been the recent history of relations between the two countries? Have relations in the past been friendly or hostile?
- How do policymakers view the nature of the threat? Is the threat seen as existential or ideological?
- What do policymakers articulate as a desirable foreign policy outcome? What behavior(s) are trying to be altered?
- What have past policies been? How successful have previous policies been in achieving their intended outcomes?

Domestic political questions

- What has been past U.S. policy toward the country? How are the policies of previous administrations viewed by the current administration? Is there a desire to “chart a new course” to distance oneself from political predecessors?
- What is the political standing of the president? Is the economy weak and is it affecting the president propensity to use military action as a tool of foreign policy (the diversionary war theory)? Is the popularity and approval rating of the president constraining in the options he sees as available?
- How risk tolerant/averse are the president and key advisers?
- What is the menu of options believed to exist by policymakers? What constraints exist or are believed to exist on the menu of alternatives?
- How and where are/were elite decisions made? Who are/were the most influential players?

⁴⁵ See George and Bennett, 86-87.

Expected Findings and Contributions

The primary finding of this project is expected to confirm the predictions of poliheuristic and neoclassical realist theory. Systemic threats and changes to the external security environment are filtered through a domestic lens as foreign policies are formulated and selected. During the first, noncompensatory stage of decision-making, U.S. policymakers rule out certain strategies and courses of action based on non-value maximizing criteria such as domestic politics. In the case of Iran, the legacy of the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis and Iranian opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process continue to frame and constrict efforts at a constructive engagement. Because of past history, diplomatic engagement is viewed negatively as appeasement. The same is likely true of reticence to directly engage North Korea on the nuclear question. Because of this, dynamic options are limited in the compensatory stage of decision-making.

The cases of Iraq and Libya are more puzzling. Why Libya was engaged is uncertain. Oil interests cannot fully explain this episode. Neither do explanations that posit that Libya was influenced by U.S. military actions in Iraq (negotiations began during the Clinton administration). While there was a willingness on Libya's part to meet British and American demands, why was this rapprochement viewed favorably and Iranian overtures not? Also puzzling is why Iraq, a state that was arguably contained by multilateral sanctions, was attacked. The answers to these questions likely lie in domestic-level explanations which this project will root out. As the research progresses, the independent variables will become clearer.

The expected findings with regards to the other variable time periods are more difficult to assess at this point. However, it is clear that the United States has continued with policies that have not achieved their objectives and have ruled out policies that likely would have for reasons that are not explained by systemic, rationalist theories. A systematic, comparative examination of these cases

contributes to the literature on domestic-political explanations of foreign policy choices as well as providing policy relevant insights into why states choose suboptimal foreign policies.

The international community tends to react only to crises. And the United States tends to react to crises instigated by rogue states by isolation and punishment, choosing constructive engagement mostly when the situation has escalated and no other choices are available. This study should provide policymakers with a clear picture of when constructive engagement works and how and why failed policies achieve path dependence. The insights should help foreign policy professionals make better policy in the future.