Rogue nations affect international security, there’s no doubt about that. The Islamic Republic of Iran, specifically, is a rogue nation that requires international attention. Iran possesses numerous characteristics that cause it to be classified as a “rogue” nation, many of which stemmed from its long and troubled past. The policy of the U.S. toward Iran began as a working relationship to build peace. Instead, certain acts on both sides of the Atlantic created a situation that resulted in sanctions against Iran and a relationship that is as far from trustworthy as the east is from the west. States that violate human rights abhorrently, support terrorism factiously, and proliferate weapons of mass destruction stubbornly cannot be trusted in today’s global community. Such states also typically criticize the United States and other western states stridently. When states have a reputation for such heinous and extremely unpredictable acts, many label them and their leaders “rogues.” Nations like Cuba, Burma, and Syria have violated human rights, supported terrorism and sought to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (WMD). However, none have been quite so rebarbative and vexing as Iran. The purpose of this essay is to define the manners in which has developed and demonstrated rogue behaviors. It will also explain the policy of the United States toward Iran and the success Washington has had in the containment of Iran’s rogue behaviors. The essay will conclude with recommendations to improve this policy.
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In his letter included in the *National Security Strategy February 2015*, President Obama addressed the “serious challenges” to America’s national security: violent extremism, evolving terrorist threats, cybersecurity issues, Russian aggression, climate change, and the outbreak of infectious diseases. He also addressed the commitment Americans have to advancing the Prague Agenda, specifically to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to secure nuclear materials in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Iran the Rogue State

As aforementioned, the characteristics that describe rogue states are those that violate human rights, support terrorism, proliferate weapons of mass destruction, and detest the west, including the United States. The behaviors of the leaders are unacceptable in the international community. Sometimes, these leaders can be overthrown—either by internal protest or external manipulation—and positive reformation can take place. Sadly, however, there are many situations when this is not the case, as with the situation in Iran. To better understand the current behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran, looking back through their history can provide insights. Iran has had a long history of victory and defeat, as well as stability and chaos.

Hundreds of years ago, Iran was the heart and soul of the Persian Empire, stretching from Anatolia and Egypt to northern India and central Asia. After Alexander the Great defeated the great empire, the region was under various rulers for centuries. In the 7th century AD, Arabs and Islam invaded the region and Persia fell under Muslim rule. In the 9th century, Persian Farsi was developed. The region experienced great turmoil under the Mongols and Turkic rulers. In the 16th century, Shi’a Islam was declared the state religion. In 1639, the Treaty of Zuhab ended the long battle against the Ottoman Empire, and early in the 19th century, Persia ceded control of Caucasus to Russia after a second Russo-Persian war. In 1935, Persia officially changed its name to Iran under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

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2. Ibid.
Then, in 1941, the Soviets and British forced the Shah to abdicate and Mohammed Reza Pahlavi became Shah. In the early 1950s, Premier Mohammed Mossadeq demonstrated what Great Britain and the United States believed to be Communist tendencies. The two countries worked together to overthrow Mossadeq. To demonstrate his gratitude, the Shah signed over 40 percent of Iran’s oil fields to American companies. The Iranian Revolution 1979 upended the progress the west was making in Iran, resulting in the hostage crisis. Anti-American sentiment and Iranian nationalism changed the course of Iran and Iran became an Islamic theocracy with a supreme leader and a president. This unstable history filled with radical changes created the culture Iranians experience today. The following information will reveal the rogue behaviors of the government of Iran with regard to human rights violations, support of terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

According to the Human Rights Watch, Iran has arrested members of opposition parties, tortured prisoners, and prevented the freedom of speech. They have also discriminated against women in many ways by restricting employment opportunities, inheritance, and child custody. In addition, Amnesty International reported, “Iran executes more people than any other country in the world except for China.” In 2012, at least 544 people were executed, including juveniles. The Human Rights Watch reported at least 270 people were executed as of October 2013. The next year, at least 200 people were executed by October, and opposition sources stated there were 400 unannounced executions in 2014. Many of the executions were for “convictions” of drug-related offenses, murder, rape, and moharebah. The term “convictions” is used lightly because oft times the people were tortured until they made a confession—truth or lie—that was used against them in legal proceedings. Such convictions were determined in unfair trials. For example, Reyhaneh Jabbari was a 26 year-old Iranian woman who was convicted of and hanged for stabbing to death a man who was trying to rape her. These were only some of the many human rights violated by the Iranian government.

Another rogue characteristic the Iranian state possesses is the support of terrorism. In his prepared testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 2012, Georgetown

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6. Ibid.


8. HRW 2015.


University’s Professor Daniel Byman explained Iran’s support for terrorism in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{11} For more than 35 years, Iran’s leadership attempted to advance its interests by working with an array of terrorist organizations, which is one of the key instruments of Iran’s foreign policy. One motivation for this policy is ideological: to spread Iran’s revolution throughout the Muslim world. The other motivation is strategic: to make a weak state appear powerful and influential.

Terrorist organizations supported by the government of Iran include, but are by no means limited to, Hizballah, Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. Hizballah is the main terrorist organization Iran uses to pursue its ambitions. Iran has grown and armed Hizballah with weapons ranging from small arms to anti-tank guided missiles and rockets. Hizballah was the terrorist organization that bombed the Khobar Towers in 1996; Iran was found ultimately responsible. Another situation in which Iran had influence was in Kenya in 2012. Two men whom Kenyan authorities believed were members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were arrested and admitted they were planning attacks, presumably against American, Israeli, Saudi and British personnel and facilities. Iran and Hizballah have plotted attacks in more than 20 countries in the last couple of years, as claimed by Israeli security officials.

Perhaps what makes Iran’s ties to terrorism most dangerous is the apparent willing risk the government takes to raise funds and equipment in the U.S. by carrying out attacks on American soil. As quoted by Byman, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said, “The 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States shows that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime.”\textsuperscript{12} Clearly, Iran uses terrorism as a ploy to carry out its ambitions in ways that distance itself from the actual acts, giving the government of Iran an opportunity to deny any and all involvement, until proven guilty. The aggressiveness of recent and continuing terrorist activity demonstrate the extremely rogue and dangerous behavior by Iran. Add to this nuclear power and there is grave concern for safety on a worldwide scale.

During the Cold War, the U.S. sought to ease the fears of the newly discovered power of nuclear reactions through the Atoms for Peace program. Through this program, Iran received some of its first nuclear power fuel and equipment, with the agreement the nuclear power program in Iran would be periodically inspected to insure the nuclear power was in fact being used for peaceful purposes, i.e., energy, and not to develop and proliferate nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, and subsequently the supreme leader’s interest in WMDs, specifically nuclear weapons, changed the agreements previously established. The Islamic Republic of Iran had no interest in working with the United States or any other western state it deemed “imperialistic”.

Time and time again, Iran has copied North Korea’s policy of “deny, delay, delay, deny.” According to Shahram Chubin’s “The Politics of Iran’s Nuclear Program,” the government of Iran acknowledged secret facilities built clandestinely that could be used for a weapons program only after other governments and Iranian exile groups shared the information.\textsuperscript{13} Iran’s heavy water reactor at

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\textsuperscript{11} Daniel Byman, “Iran’s Support for Terrorism in the Middle East,” testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, July 25, 2012.

\textsuperscript{12} Byman, p. 5.

Arak is capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium from the spent uranium fuel. Iran also has a nuclear power station in Bushehr, uranium enrichment facilities in Natanz and Qom, and a suspected nuclear weapons facility at Parchin.\textsuperscript{14} The evidence is there: a heavy water reactor; uranium enrichment facilities; uranium mines; Russian assistance; clandestine facilities; and prohibition of inspections. All of these, along with Iranian animosity toward the west, are indicators Iran seeks to proliferate nuclear weapons.

U.S. Policy toward Iran

President Obama’s policy toward Iran, according to both the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2010 and 2015, focuses on containing Iran’s nuclear energy and weapon ambition. “Iran” is mentioned 14 times in the 2010 NSS,\textsuperscript{15} and 11 times in the 2015 NSS.\textsuperscript{16} Of these 25 times, thrice did it mention rogue behaviors other than nuclear weapons proliferation. The support of terrorism, the seemingly never-ending strife between Israelis and Palestinians, and the violation of human rights seem to be the primary underlying causes of concern for Iran’s ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a rogue nation with such close ties to terrorist organizations and crimes against humanity create cause for extreme concern and swift yet careful actions.

As previously stated, through the U.S. Atoms for Peace Program in the 1950s, Iran received its first nuclear fuel, equipment and capabilities to build a nuclear power station. In an effort to thwart nuclear weapon proliferation, the Eisenhower administration sought to create and spread peaceful uses for nuclear power: energy. Through the Atoms for Peace Program, countries were able to receive nuclear materials as long as they agreed to inspections that ensured they were not using the technology for military purposes. In 1974, the Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran with plans to build 20 nuclear reactors, a uranium enrichment facility, and a reprocessing plant for spent fuel. However, these objectives were deemed un-Islamic by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The nuclear ambitions were terminated. A few years later—halfway through the First Persian Gulf War and perhaps not quite so surprisingly—Supreme Leader Khomeini reinstated the nuclear program in 1984 with a promise from Russia to help. The UN Security Council demanded that Iran stop its uranium enrichment program but this deterred neither Iran nor Russia, and Russia began supplying enriched uranium in 2007.

The policy of the U.S. toward many rogue states has been to remove the rogue leaders and replace them with whomever the U.S. deemed worthy, i.e., “puppets” as many would call them. This is what the U.S. did with Iran. They essentially ousted Mossadeq—the Prime Minister the Iranians adored. The involvement the U.S. had in Iranian politics built animosity in the Iranian population toward America. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the hostage crisis set a path for failure and defeat with America’s vision to promote peaceful nuclear power and to build an influential relationship in the Middle East.


Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and his successor Ali Khamenei, have built a theocratic state that supports terrorism, despises America and any other states it deems to have imperialistic ideals. However, acting on that hatred in such a manner as to support terrorist organizations whose goal is to annihilate western culture is extreme and not tolerated by the modern first world. What would happen if Iran did, in fact, succeed in fabricating nuclear weapons? The world can only plan for the worst, and hope we are wrong.

Due to the repeated and inexcusable rogue behaviors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States decided it was time for a change. Already deeply involved in the Cold War, the U.S. had every intention to avoid yet another hot war. The U.S. decided to impose sanctions on Iran.

The first action was the “result of Iran’s support for international terrorism and its aggressive actions against non-belligerent shipping in the Persian Gulf.” President Reagan issued Executive Order 12613 in 1987, which imposed “a new import embargo on Iranian-origin goods and services.” In 1995, President Clinton issued two executive orders. The first was issued in March “as a result of Iranian support of international terrorism and Iran’s active pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.” It prohibited U.S. involvement with petroleum development in Iran. The other executive order issued that year further strengthened sanctions against Iran. The other executive order issued that year prohibited “virtually all trade and investment activities with Iran by U.S. persons, wherever located.” In 2008, the “U-turn” transfers involving Iran that were authorized became revoked. In 2010, the “authorization to import into the United States, and deal in, certain foodstuffs and carpets of Iranian origin was revoked.”

According to the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, Congress found the “illicit nuclear activities of the Government of Iran, combined with its development of unconventional weapons and ballistic missiles and its support for international terrorism, represent a threat to the United States, its strong ally Israel, and other allies of the United States around the world.” The policy to impose sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran is an effort to persuade them to stop supporting terrorism and to no longer pursue weapons of mass destruction, specifically, nuclear weapons.

Recently, however, there has been what many hope is progress toward containing Iran’s nuclear program. The United States decided to alter its policy toward Iran. In March 2015, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif attend a conference with representatives from the United States, China, Russia, Great Britain, France and Germany (a.k.a., P5+1) in Switzerland. Because Iran persists its


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, the deal proposed is that sanctions will periodically be eased as long as Iran allows the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN, and other international peacekeeping organizations in to inspect facilities and Iran stops enriching uranium. In 2013, Iran received some sanctions relief when it agreed to freeze some nuclear activities.

As Byman posited, the “impressive sanctions the United States and its allies have orchestrated against Iran have hit the regime hard.” According the CIA World Factbook, Iran’s real GDP growth rate was negative in 2012 and 2013. If sanctions are lifted, it would permit Iran to diversify and increase its international trade, creating an influx of external revenue. This alteration to the U.S. policy with Iran could have a positive influence on Iran’s status as a rogue state. Unfortunately, this policy has had little success in containing Iran’s rogue behavior overall. Sanctions were enacted 30 years ago, yet terrorist organizations have strengthened, Iranians have been tortured and executed in mass quantities, and Iran consistently pursued a questionable nuclear program with Russia’s assistance.

Policy Recommendations

It is important the U.S. continues its course to coerce and convince the leadership of Iran to stop its nuclear weapons ambitions. The recent nuclear talks the P5 + 1 have had with Iran regarded sanctions and nuclear ambitions. Come the end of 2015, the world should know the effects of the talks held in March of the same year.

If sanctions are lifted, Iran could put more money into the pockets of its terrorist allies, namely Hizballah. Convincing Iran to drop its support of Hizballah, as well as disbanding Hizballah, is a challenge many experts do not quite know how to confront with a victory that would limit international damage and loss of human life. Most likely, such a confrontation would be a bloody battle for Iranians, but there is a need for the entire region to sever ties with terrorists like Hizballah and al-Qa’ida. If the Iranians and other citizens of the Middle Eastern region joined forces and worked together to defeat the extremist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, they would help build regional unity—a unity that has not existed for far too long. Conducting such a comprehensive campaign without considerable consequences would be a great challenge for the entire world to endure. Nevertheless, if the world could be promised the Middle East would finally be at peace, the world would come together to help Iran and the rest of the Middle East enjoy a peace long overdue.

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