

U.S. Negotiations with Rogue States during the Early Portion of the Twenty-First Century

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1. Introduction

Over the past five years, Barack Obama has made various decisions that have been described as historic. During 2010, he signed The Affordable Care Act, which was designed to provide every U.S. citizen with health insurance. Three years after this piece of legislation was approved, Obama took a step on the international level that caught the attention of numerous people. For approximately thirty-four years, there was no direct communication between the leaders of Iran and the United States. However, in September 2013, Obama elected to have a conversation over the telephone with Hassan Rouhani, the newly elected President of this rogue state. Following this discussion, diplomats from the U.S. and other Western states met with Iranian representatives on multiple occasions in locations such as Geneva. In the early portion of 2014, these negotiators managed to reach a diplomatic agreement.

This was not the first time in the twenty-first century that the United States supported an agreement with a rogue state. When George W. Bush came into office in 2001, Libya was considered to be a rogue state by most people in the United States. It did not begin to acquire a more respectable reputation until Bush had his subordinates agree to pacts with Libyan representatives. Bush and Obama both backed deals with rogue states, but there is an important difference between these two leaders that deserves to be mentioned. Obama was not determined to hold a rogue state accountable for all of its prior misconduct. Bush, in contrast, insisted that a state should be held accountable for every transgression that it committed in the past. It will be possible for the reader to notice this distinction if the Libyan and Iranian cases are looked at more closely in subsequent sections.

2. U.S.-Libyan Relations

Towards the beginning of a book entitled *America and the Rogue States*, Thomas Henriksen notes how policymakers in Washington usually classify a country as a rogue state if it engages in two activities. In the second part of the twentieth century, the major powers in the international system started to take steps to reduce the likelihood of nuclear war, including decreasing the amount of weapons of mass destruction that they possessed. While these nations were eliminating some of their nuclear weapons, others were working assiduously to acquire these potent weapons.ⁱ Certain nations with nuclear ambitions were also sponsoring acts of terrorism.ⁱⁱ

One of the nations, which was pursuing nuclear weapons and assisting with the execution of terrorist attacks, was Libya. In order to understand why this North African nation engaged in these activities, it is imperative to look at an event that transpired in the late 1960s. From 1951 to 1969, Libya was ruled by King Idris I. During this eighteen year period, Idris often exhibited a willingness to cooperate with leaders from other states. For example, in the summer of 1968, he signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Once this monarch's regime was toppled in 1969, a man named Moammar Gadhafi took control of Libya. While the 1970s were in progress, there were various indications that Gadhafi did not intend to continue working with parties outside of Libya to decrease the chances of nuclear warfare. Among

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them was his decision to import twelve hundred tons of uranium from Niger without notifying the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA).ⁱⁱⁱ

After the 1970s, various members of the Libyan regime continued to concentrate on developing nuclear weapons. In 1984, they were able to acquire a uranium conversion facility.^{iv} Thirteen years later, they received a considerable amount of assistance from another nation that was determined to start a nuclear program. It is quite common for the leaders of a country to focus on producing nuclear warheads after they have learned that an adversary is attempting to gain access to these destructive weapons.^v During 1974, Pakistani officials learned that India, an arch rival, had conducted a nuclear test. Upon hearing this information, they embarked on a campaign to develop a nuclear program. At one point in 1997, the individuals who were involved in this Pakistani initiative sent centrifuges to the figures who were trying to build nuclear weapons in Libya.^{vi}

As certain figures in the Libyan government were focusing on acquiring nuclear weapons in the 1980s and 1990s, others were planning acts of terrorism in different parts of the globe. In 1986, two American soldiers and a Turkish woman were killed when a bomb was detonated at a disco in Berlin. It was eventually determined that this attack had been organized by individuals serving in different departments inside the Libyan government.^{vii} The bombing in Berlin was not the most destructive act of terrorism that was traced back to figures within the Libyan regime. On December 21, 1988, Pan American Flight 103 took off from Heathrow Airport in London. It was scheduled to land at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City. However, the plane never arrived at this destination because a bomb, which had been planted by operatives with ties to Tripoli, went off while it was over Lockerbie, Scotland. This explosion killed 270 people, including thirty-five students from Syracuse University.^{viii}

For many years, Libyan officials insisted that they were not linked to any terrorist attacks. However, as the twenty-first century commenced, there were developments that suggested they would finally be willing to take responsibility for operations like the Lockerbie bombing. In March 2001, Gadhafi met with Michael Steiner, an official in the German government. While this meeting was in progress, the former “admitted that Libya took part in terrorist actions (La Belle, Lockerbie). He clarified that he had abandoned terrorism and seeks the opportunity to make Libya’s new position known.”^{ix} Three years after this information was shared with the German government, the Libyan regime sent a letter to the United Nations addressing its prior misconduct. Within this document, Gadhafi and his advisors accepted the blame for the bombing of Pan American Flight 103, but they did not allude to their involvement in the attack on the Berlin disco.

A religious figure would probably assert that Libyan officials chose to alter their behavior because they were determined to atone for their previous sins. However, this change in conduct actually took place for another reason. After leaders in the West learned about Libya’s involvement in terrorist attacks and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, they attempted to punish this country with sanctions and other measures. During the middle and latter stages of the 1990s, there were multiple signs that these punitive measures were harming the Libyan economy. In 1996, Libya experienced a noticeable rise in inflation. Two year later, it was revealed that sanctions had “cost Libya as much as \$18 billion in lost revenue.”^x Men like Gadhafi were hopeful that maneuvers such as sending a letter to the United Nations would prompt countries to eliminate the crippling measures that had been imposed on their country. These moves placated some states, but others indicated that they would not be amenable to making changes until Libya engaged in additional activities, including providing financial compensation to individuals who lost family members in prior acts of terrorism. One of the countries, which claimed that money needed to be allocated to these people, was the United States. Libyan officials later provided financial aid to victims on multiple occasions. When they contributed 1.5 billion dollars to a compensation fund in the aftermath of negotiations with American diplomats in 2008, George W. Bush made some notable changes. For instance, he opted to restore Tripoli’s immunity from terror-related lawsuits.^{xi}

Libyan officials managed to eliminate some American punitive measures by allocating financial assistance to the relatives of individuals who perished in terrorist attacks. However, others were not removed until these men chose to halt the other activity that had sparked international condemnation. The members of

the international community first learned that the Libyan regime was prepared to cease its pursuit of nuclear weapons on December 19, 2003. At this time, Gadhafi declared that he would no longer be attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The Bush administration's response to Gadhafi's announcement was akin to its reaction to the introduction of a new Libyan policy regarding terrorism. In other words, the figures in the administration claimed they would not be convinced that another policy was being followed unless Gadhafi took more steps such as permitting outside parties to conduct thorough inspections within Libya. During future negotiations about the issue of weapons of mass destruction, U.S. representatives were informed that Gadhafi would actually be willing to allow outsiders to remove nuclear-related materials from his country. After personnel from the United States and Great Britain discarded approximately 1,032 metric tons of material, Bush lifted the remaining American sanctions on Libya.^{xii}

3. U.S.-Iranian Relations

While Iran was being ruled by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, it behaved like Libya did during the reign of Idris I. In other words, it cooperated with most of the nations in the international community. This cooperation ceased in the late 1970s when Pahlavi's government was replaced by a hardline Islamic theocracy. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the new Iranian government, wanted to establish theocratic regimes in other Middle Eastern nations.^{xiii} One way that he tried to create additional theocracies was by assisting branches of a subversive organization named Hezbollah.

The most powerful wing of Hezbollah was located in Lebanon. Throughout the 1980s, Hezbollah militants conducted terrorist attacks on Lebanese territory. On some occasions, they opted to target individuals who were affiliated with other countries. An act of terrorism that transpired in 1983 can be utilized to illustrate this point. During this year, soldiers from Western nations were participating in a peacekeeping mission within Lebanon. On October 23rd, operatives from Hezbollah placed bombs by the facilities that were being used to house these troops. When these explosives were detonated, numerous soldiers were killed and injured. All of the deceased were from France and the United States.^{xiv} The former lost fifty-eight soldiers in the attack, while the latter lost 241 individuals.

As the last decade of the twentieth century was in progress, more American soldiers were killed by another Hezbollah wing. In 1990, divisions of the Iraqi military occupied the country of Kuwait. The leaders of Saudi Arabia feared that Iraqi forces would eventually invade their country. Saudi military personnel were deemed to be incapable of repelling an Iraqi invasion, so officials in Riyadh asked the United States and other Western countries to send troops to Saudi Arabia. By the middle of the 1990s, only members of the U.S. military were situated on Saudi territory.^{xv} During the summer of 1996, nineteen of these soldiers were killed when a bomb exploded at the Khobar Towers, a housing complex. Following a thorough investigation, individuals from the U.S. government concluded that the Saudi branch of Hezbollah was responsible for the attack.

The sponsoring of terrorist attacks was not the only Iranian activity that caught the attention of individuals in Washington. During the 1980s, members of the American government came into contact with information that indicated the Iranians were attempting to acquire nuclear weapons. In 1984, Alan Cranston, a Senator from California, even claimed that the hardliners in Tehran would have a nuclear capability by the early part of the 1990s.^{xvi} When the next decade commenced, they did not possess any nuclear weapons. In order to understand why the Iranians were unable to construct weapons of mass destruction by this point in time, it is necessary to look closely at some developments that transpired in a military conflict against Iraq. While the Iran-Iraq War was in progress, multiple facilities that were connected to the Iranian nuclear program were damaged by members of the Iraqi military on several occasions. This damage forced the individuals at the top of the Iranian government to order a cessation of all nuclear-related activities.

The Iranians resumed the campaign to acquire nuclear weapons in the aftermath of the war. As the campaign to build these potent weapons continued, figures in the American government received new reports about the conduct of individuals with strong ties to the Iranian program. Some of these reports came from

moles inside the theocratic regime. Meanwhile, others were provided by dissident groups that were interested in seeing the theocracy fall. Towards the end of the summer of 2002, a figure in the National Council of Resistance of Iran made some remarks regarding the Iranian program. While he was speaking about this issue, he revealed that the government was in the process of building two new nuclear facilities. One was a uranium enrichment facility in Natanz, a city in Isfahan province. The other was a heavy-water facility in Arak, a metropolis in Markazi province.^{xvii}

The figures at the top of the Iranian Government eventually indicated that they would be willing to refrain from engaging in condemned activities. Like the leaders of Libya, Iranian officials made this policy shift because they detected that Western punitive measures were harming the economy in their nation. Within an editorial from December 2013, David Ignatius, a columnist for *The Washington Post*, demonstrates how the most effective Western punitive measure was the introduction of sanctions. Once sanctions were in place, major parts of the Iranian economy started to deteriorate, including the auto industry. During 2011, 1.5 million automobiles were produced in Iran.^{xviii} However, in 2012, the annual production rate in this sector of the economy began to decline.^{xix}

Following the above metamorphosis, there were some individuals in the West who insisted that Iran could still not be trusted. However, this skepticism did not keep representatives from Western nations such as the United States from brokering the agreement with Iranian officials at the beginning of 2014. Once the major components of this accord became public knowledge, it became quite clear that America was handling negotiations with rogue states differently in the Obama era. In the preceding section, we saw how U.S. negotiators attempted to address all of Libya's previous transgressions under George W. Bush. In other words, they tried to hold this state accountable for sponsoring acts of terrorism as well as pursuing weapons of mass destruction. During the Obama presidency, representatives did not place any emphasis on the former while negotiations were in progress. Instead, they devoted all of their attention to the latter. This conclusion must be reached because the 2014 agreement only asked Iran to halt the majority of its uranium enrichment in exchange for the easing of Western sanctions.^{xx}

4. Conclusion

Over the years, there have been spirited debates within the field of international relations. A lot of these disagreements have been between the proponents of different schools of thought. However, there have also been times when the members of a particular school of thought have not seen eye to eye. A school of thought, which has experienced internal debates on more than one occasion, is realism. The most prominent disputes have transpired between neorealists and classical realists. One of these debates dealt with the likelihood of world peace. Within the publications of neorealists, very little attention was paid to the possibility of nations peacefully co-existing. Consequently, readers were forced to conclude that these analysts were convinced that tranquility was inconceivable. Classical realists appeared to be more optimistic because they presented strategies for establishing a more peaceful world in their respective publications, including having the representatives of feuding nations enter into negotiations with each other.^{xxi}

Within this article, we have seen how George W. Bush and Barack Obama elected to enter into negotiations with certain rogue states. These men were willing to take this step, but they had American representatives utilize different approaches while negotiations were in progress. During the Bush presidency, U.S. diplomats attempted to hold Libya accountable for sponsoring acts of terrorism and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Iran also engaged in these activities for an extended period of time. However, when meetings were held with this state during Obama's second term, it was just held accountable for its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

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- ⁱ Thomas Henriksen, *American and the Rogue States*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp.1-2.
- ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kenneth Timmerman, "Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Cases of Iran, Syria, and Libya," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Middle East Defense News*, August 1992.
- ^{iv} International Atomic Energy Association Board of Governors, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya," February 20, 2004.
- ^v John Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, pp.231-232.
- ^{vi} International Atomic Energy Association Board of Governors, February 20, 2004.
- ^{vii} Steven Erlanger, "4 Guilty in Fatal 1986 Berlin Disco Bombing Linked to Libya," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2001.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*
- ^{ix} German Foreign Ministry, *Memorandum about the Meeting between Michael Steiner and Moammar Gadhafi*, 2001.
- ^x *The Economist*, *Statistics Pertaining to the Libyan Economy*, 1999, p.56.
- ^{xi} BBC News, "Libya Compensates Terror Victims," 2008.
- ^{xii} CNN, "Bush Signs Order Lifting Sanctions on Libya," 2004.
- ^{xiii} Mark Katz, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Waves*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997, pp.25-26.
- ^{xiv} Jefferson Morley, "What Is Hezbollah?" *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2006.
- ^{xv} U.S. House of Representatives, *National Security Report*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, p.1.
- ^{xvi} Alan Cranston, *Remarks Regarding the Nuclear Ambitions of Iran*, 1984.
- ^{xvii} David Sanger, "Dissidents Claim Iran Is Building a New Enrichment Site," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2010.
- ^{xviii} David Ignatius, "Iran Copes with Sanctions But Wants to Bloom," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2013.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*
- ^{xx} Rick Gladstone and Nick Cumming-Bruce, "New Push Is Made to Free an American While Iran Is at the Negotiating Table," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2014
- ^{xxi} Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, New York: Knopf, 1978, p.531.