

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF LIBYA AS A ROGUE STATE

**By Sally Totman and Mat Hardy
Deakin University
Burwood,
Australia**

ABSTRACT

From 1980 until 2006, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Libya) was considered by the United States as a "Rogue State". However, in May 2006, the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, welcomed Libya back into the world community and declared that this erstwhile enemy had reformed. But has the American public registered this change in Libya's status? Has this return to the fold influenced U.S. public opinion about Libya and its eccentric leader, Colonel Qaddafi? Or is it merely a case of new foes pushing old ones out of mind? What might some of America's new "Rogue State" enemies learn from Libya's example? This paper explores the nexus between the tumultuous U.S.-Libyan relationship and the U.S. public, and analyses how and why perceptions of Libya have changed.

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In the early hours of April 15 1986, American warplanes spent 10 deadly minutes over Tripoli. Some of the aircraft had flown from as far away as the United Kingdom to release over 200 bombs and nearly 50 missiles onto targets within the Libyan capital. The mercurial Colonel Qaddafi himself narrowly missed becoming a casualty although 15 other Libyans were not so lucky. One American aircraft was downed by Libyan air defenses over the Gulf of Sidra, with the loss of both crewmen.

The air raid was the climax of years of skirmishes and mutual provocation by both Libya and the United States. For the two nations, the various clashes since 1981 were heavily wrapped in rhetoric about state-sponsored terrorism, sovereignty and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The Americans also expressed fears about Libya's pursuit of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Libya was later implicated in two shocking terrorist attacks against civilian airliners. Punitive and devastating sanctions were applied. At the time, Libya and its wayward leader were considered the major threats to America. In 1986, 71 percent of Americans polled approved of the U.S. bombing of Tripoli,¹ and over 30 percent stated that Colonel Qaddafi was the "chief sponsor" of international terrorism.²

All these factors, not to mention the personification of the Libyan threat via Qaddafi, should be eerily familiar to anyone reflecting on the lead-up to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the pursuit of Saddam Hussein. The scale of the military intervention and its duration are strikingly different though; as have been the results for the people of Libya and Iraq (and their leaders). Whilst Saddam Hussein is no more and Iraq still burns, on the 15th of May 2006, Libya and the United States

formally buried their differences by re-establishing diplomatic ties that had been severed in 1981. “Today marks the opening of a new era in U.S.-Libya relations that will benefit Americans and Libyans alike,” said U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. The former ‘Public Enemy Number 1’ had quietly been rehabilitated and paroled. More remarkably, this had occurred in a period where propaganda about state-sponsored terrorism and jingoistic references to clashes of civilizations were the dominant paradigm.

Whilst many authors have examined the approach of the Bush administration to a repentant Libya, the current research on Libya appears limited to examining its transition in U.S. foreign policy from “Rogue State” to “Good Fellow”.³ There have been few attempts to explore the shifts in U.S. public opinion towards Libya since its apparent redemption and re-acceptance by the Bush administration. While the administration change of attitude is apparent, it is not at all clear that a commensurate change has occurred in the realm of public opinion. This study proposes to address this lacuna.

This research follows on from Totman’s forthcoming book on Rogue States and popular culture, which demonstrated the correlation between American public opinion and contemporary depictions of foreign enemies.⁴ Since at one time Libya was considered by the American public to be the most significant enemy after the Soviet Union, it is now remarkable that the North African nation barely registers in similar surveys. Indeed, today Libya seems to score more highly in categories such as “Don’t know” or “No opinion” than it does as an enemy.⁵

What is behind this transition in public opinion from significant enemy to obscure would-be ally? Has the American public registered the official change in Libya’s

status? Has this return to the fold influenced U.S. public opinion about Libya and its eccentric leader, Colonel Qaddafi? Or is it merely a case of new foes pushing old ones out of mind? Importantly, is there a formula for redemption that other, more current, foes might seek to emulate?

JOINING THE ROGUES' GALLERY

In order to understand this shift we need to look at the background of the Rogue State concept and examine how and why these enemies have featured so prominently in American policy and public opinion as the world transcended the Cold War and bipolarity.

The concept of Rogue States has been around in one form or another for decades. Initially it was used to refer to states whose internal actions against their citizenry were perceived to be abhorrent by international standards. With the focus on state-sponsored terrorism of the late 1970s though, the label shifted in context to emphasize external actions. The 'Rogue Doctrine' familiar to us today was developed by General Colin Powell in 1989 as a preemptive response to the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union and the potential loss of the United States' major enemy under the bi-polar system.⁶ For the U.S. military, the fading of the Soviet threat signified a more tangible menace: the need to downsize and reduce budgets. By creating the 'Rogue Doctrine', Powell sought to limit the scale of the cutbacks by identifying a number of smaller potential enemies throughout the developing world.⁷ Although the label of 'Rogue State' was not in currency at the time, Libya was a prime candidate for membership to

this new category of enemy, given the clashes of the 1980s and the Lockerbie bombing.

It was under the Clinton administration, and in particular Madeline Albright, that the term 'Rogue State' became more common and further refined. Albright referred to 'Rogue States' as one of four distinct categories of state. In particular those who "Not only do not see an advantage to a functioning international system, but they feel that they are more important when they can disrupt the international system."⁸

For Libya, joining the Rogue State club was a natural transition from being labeled as an "outlaw state" by its old sparring partner, Ronald Reagan. Libya was grouped with Iran, Iraq, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan and Syria in various speeches and policy documents during Clinton's presidency.⁹ These states were often described as being state sponsors of terrorism and/or states pursuing WMD programs.¹⁰ Despite the inclusion of a number of countries in this group (and "concerns" being raised about others, such as Pakistan), Iraq and Iran bore the brunt of American opprobrium throughout the 1990s. Libya was mentioned mainly in the context of the Lockerbie bombing and the ongoing attempts to bring the suspects for the bombing to trial. In key policy documents such as Anthony Lake's *Confronting Backlash States*, Libya was mentioned only once, in a list of outlaw states and with no specific elaboration provided. North Korea rated two paragraphs, and the rest of the ten pages discuss Iran and Iraq.¹¹ This formula changed little the 9/11 attacks.

In his State of the Union Address on 29 January 2002, President George W. Bush decried Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "Axis of Evil". Libya had seemingly dropped off the list of top antagonists. It was not, however, permanently expunged. In May 2002 Under Secretary of State John Bolton reverted to the 1990s prescription and

extended the Axis to include Libya, Syria and Cuba.¹² These states were incorporated into the expanded line-up because they were “state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or who have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction or have the capability to do so in violation of their treaty obligations.”¹³ Libya was singled out as actively pursuing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs, as well as ballistic missiles. However, Bolton did offer hope to Libya: he noted that resolving the Lockerbie impasse and complying with treaty obligations governing weapons of mass destruction would be counted as a “positive gesture”.¹⁴

Therefore, despite this inclusion in the Axis of Evil, a door was left (ever so slightly) ajar for Libya to seek reconciliation with the United States. Himself no friend of fundamentalist Islam, Qaddafi was shrewd enough a politician to be aware of the momentum that was gathering against Iraq and Saddam. When Iraq was forcibly removed from the Axis of Evil list through full-scale military occupation, Libya’s leader decided to respond to Washington’s demands for reform. This led to the guarded reconciliation between Libya and the West.

But what of the American public’s opinion of Libya before and after 9/11? How were Americans reacting to this gallery of rogues and axis members?

AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF LIBYA

U.S.-Libyan relations began to deteriorate rapidly following the inauguration of President Reagan in January 1981. From this time onward, Libya was accused of being a state that supported and perpetrated acts of terrorism.¹⁵ In February 1981, the

U.S. media reported that Qaddafi's revolutionary committees called for Libyan dissidents living abroad to be assassinated by Libyan hit squads.¹⁶

In 1981, Claire Sterling published a book called *The Terror Network*, the major argument of which was that the Soviet Union was a central and strategic sponsor of terrorism, with Cuba, the PLO and Qaddafi working on the tactical level to promote and train the actual terrorists.¹⁷ The result of these efforts, Sterling argued, was that small local movements had been turned into global threats. The book heavily influenced the Reagan administration's approach to terrorism and amplified the shift in U.S. foreign policy from Carter's human rights focus to Reagan's early version of the War Against Terrorism, in which Libya was a major player.¹⁸ Whether this view was warranted or not, the conflation of Arab nationalism, the Palestinian question, Sh'ia fundamentalism and the ideological battle against communism in Central America created a muddled picture to the public, where even relatively insignificant dictators like Qaddafi warranted the attentions of aircraft carrier groups and long-range bombing missions from the United Kingdom.

The White House did little to alleviate this confusion. At a news conference on April 9, 1986, President Reagan portrayed Qaddafi as a religious zealot, apparently of the same type that had come to power in Iran seven years before. "Well, we know that this mad dog of the Middle East has a goal of a world revolution, Moslem fundamentalist revolution, which is targeted on many of his own Arab compatriots."¹⁹ This was a patent nonsense: in the 1970s and 1980s Qaddafi had repeatedly warned against the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and been ruthless in suppressing them in Libya. The parallels with the way in which George W. Bush inexplicably linked Saddam Hussein with al-Qaeda two decades later are too strong to ignore.

A further parallel lies in the conflation Libya with Iran and other enemies of the mid-1980s. Just as the Axis of Evil later served to amalgamate America's 21st century enemies, Reagan painted his foes as a malevolent yet barmy collective. He was fond of jointly disparaging the leaders of Libya, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua and their various alleged activities directed against the United States:

The American people are not, I repeat, not going to tolerate intimidation, terror, and outright acts of war against this nation and its people. And we're especially not going to tolerate these attacks from outlaw states run by the strangest collection of misfits, loony tunes, and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich.²⁰

In public opinion polls this trend of conflation continued, with Gallup posing questions on approval of such things as "Taking military action against terrorists or groups or nations that have supported them such as Iran, Libya, and Syria".²¹

Qaddafi of course did little to evade the labels and invective that were being directed at him from the United States and the West in general. His erratic behavior and theatrical statements were an amusing counterpoint to his more serious involvement in providing resources for dissident groups the world over. By maintaining links and at least token support for groups like the IRA, ETA and even pro-separatist Australian aborigines, Qaddafi ensured that he was seen as more than a Middle Eastern actor.

Ronald Reagan was as adept at amplifying the Libyan threat as Qaddafi was at playing to the image. For example, in Reagan's Address to the Nation on *the United States Air Strike Against Libya*, of April 14 1986, the U.S. president said that "Colonel Qaddafi is not only an enemy of the United States....this man has made their

[the Libyans'] country a synonym for barbarism around the world.”²² On other occasions, Reagan liked to refer to Qaddafi as “the mad dog of the Middle East”.

Meanwhile, popular culture had by this time latched on to Libya as the enemy *du jour*. Hollywood box office triumphs like *Top Gun* (1986) portrayed a very thinly disguised Libya as an aggressive, yet ultimately inept rogue state. In *Back to the Future* (1985), a bizarre sub-plot involving a bumbling Libyan terrorist squad was an incongruous addition to a family-oriented science fiction film.

Libya first appeared as a key ‘character’ in Hollywood film at the same time as it was becoming a key ‘character’ in U.S. foreign policy. The film *Back to the Future* is a prime example of this with the concept being developed following the 1981 Gulf of Sidra incident and the supposed ‘Libyan hit-squads’ targeting dissidents and the film being released just prior to the 1986 Gulf of Sidra incident.

The emerging perception of Libya’s ‘rogue character’ was paralleled in both American foreign policy and Hollywood films. Before Libya was identified as a Rogue State by the American government it was not singled out for ‘special’ treatment in Hollywood film. Before 1980, Libyans were not portrayed as a ‘category’ and they were certainly not portrayed as terrorists, bombers or the ‘baddies’. After 1980 however Libyans emerged in Hollywood films with their own identity, which is that of terrorists, bombers, and ‘the enemy’ of the West.

Indeed, throughout the 1980s Libya was used as the default minor enemy in several Hollywood films including *Back to the Future*; *Half Moon Street* (1986); *Broadcast*

News (1987); *The Naked Gun* (1988); and *Terror Squad* (1988); which all portrayed Libyans as the villain juxtaposed with the heroic United States. These five films portrayed Libyans as terrorists of various sorts and in *Broadcast News* a newsreader declares that: “Libya has always been an outlaw nation”. During this piece, archival footage of Colonel Qaddafi appears on screen. Furthermore, Libya tended to be used as the ‘bad guy’ without need for explanation in some Hollywood films of the 1990s. The producers of such films seemed to assume that audiences would readily accept Libya’s wickedness and Libyans or terrorist groups financed by Libya appeared as sub-plots or unrelated prologues to several films.

However as real-world focus shifted to Iraq, references in Hollywood film of Libya as a Rogue State decreased. Although several films such as *Cover-Up* (1991) and *Eve of Destruction* (1991) mention the Libyans in passing they are included with Arabs and Muslims in general, or else they are specifically linked to Iraq in the tried and tested technique of conflating different enemies and disputes.

As Iraq assumed the mantle of America’s number one enemy in the 1990s, the inclusion of Libya in films became less frequent. During the administration of George H. Bush, Libya only featured in three Hollywood films as an enemy. During Bill Clinton’s eight years in office, Libya was presented as an enemy (and a very minor one at that) in just two Hollywood films.

The role of Hollywood films in the construction, consolidation and propagation of Libya’s reputation as a Rogue State is evident. Hollywood’s espousal of Libya’s delinquency is pervasive throughout all genres and across all target audience groups

from teens through to seniors. The association between the change in Libyan status in American foreign policy and the changing portrayal of Libya in American films is significant. Evidence to support this trend can be found in the overall shift in American opinion about Libya during the same period.

LIBYA IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Tracking public perceptions of Libya via opinion polls over the past 20 years is problematic because the country has not featured consistently in such surveys. While the 1986 confrontations resulted in more intensive polling of American-Libyan relations, Gallup only occasionally surveyed attitudes to Libya thereafter. Other polling organizations such as Pew and Angus Reid have similar gaps. Over the years Gallup has been the most consistent in its polling of American attitudes to foreign countries as perceived threats to the United States. For that reason this paper relies on Gallup polls as the basis for its analysis.

The questions Gallup asks about threats and enemies vary from year to year and depend on the sponsors of the poll. A question regarding the “greatest threat” to American security can be understood in a number of ways by respondents: conventional military threat, terrorist potential, economic competition, even the threat of increased immigration from certain countries could come to mind. The question also requires respondents to choose only a single answer even if they feel equally threatened by two or more states. Surveys where respondents are asked if they have a positive or negative opinion of a state or leader do not share this shortcoming as negative opinions can be recorded for multiple subjects. These do not necessarily

relate to what people see as the greatest threat to national security. Of course, the states need to be included in the survey for the respondents to be asked in the first place, and this has not always been the case for Libya.

It is no surprise to find that the highest point of anti-Libyan sentiment occurred at the time of its most violent encounters with America and the West. Libya's implication in the bombings at airports in Rome and Vienna in December 1985, as well as a nightclub in Berlin, made military action a subject of opinion polling. When asked in January 1986 "What steps, if any, do you think the United States should take in this situation, which has been linked to the Libyan government?", 13.48 percent of respondents expressly favored military action.²³ While this may not seem overwhelming it far exceeded all other options except for economic sanctions, which rated at 15.43 percent.

A few weeks later, after the naval clashes in the Gulf of Sidra of March 24, American public opinion became more bellicose. Nearly 75 percent of respondents said they felt the naval action justified.²⁴ Nearly 63 percent of those surveyed felt the strikes on Libyan assets were worth undertaking, even if it increased the risk of terrorist attacks.²⁵

Following the Berlin disco bombing and the major air raids that followed, Americans showed a similar level of support, with 71 percent of Gallup's respondents approving the strikes.²⁶ Over 41 percent of people in the same survey felt that engineering a coup against Qaddafi was the best "principal means of dealing with Libya". Over 80 percent favored a repeat of military action if Libya "sponsors terrorist acts against the U.S. in the future". Interestingly, only 64 percent favored military action against Syria

or Iran should they commit “terrorist acts against the U.S.” This would seem to indicate that rogue states that are currently ‘in the spotlight’ are more likely to be the target of public animosity than those that, for one reason or another, are not presently the focus of invective from an American administration.

The mood had cooled by the end of 1986. Opinion polls conducted from September to November on behalf of the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs asked questions about the U.S. government’s handling of various foreign policy events of the preceding months, including the bombing of Libya. One poll was a survey of the general public²⁷ and the other was built from in-person interviews with “national leaders”²⁸. For both surveys, the Libya question was identical: “How would you rate the following actions of the U.S. government? Would you say...The U.S. bombing of Libya...was excellent, good, fair, or poor?” The percentage of respondents describing the strikes on Libya as ‘excellent’ was 26.77 percent (general public) and 28.86 percent (national leaders). If one then adds those respondents who answered ‘good’, the figures rises to 59.05 percent and 57.14 percent respectively. The American public’s bellicosity towards Libya had clearly declined in just a few short months.

Feelings towards Colonel Qaddafi though were still acrimonious. The same survey of the general public showed that 83.55 percent of respondents had a negative attitude towards the Libyan leader, with 56.56 percent giving him the lowest possible score. This is compared to a total of only 32.11 percent ‘cold or unfavorable’ for Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the United States principal enemy at the time. Indeed, in another survey conducted in October 1986, more people felt that Reagan’s description of the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’ was inaccurate (46.84 percent) than those who

felt it was accurate (43.2 percent).²⁹ A rogue state in the limelight is apparently more detested by the public than a non-rogue yet still 'hostile' nation.

After those polls of late 1986, and despite Libya's implication in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Gallup did not pose a single question about Libya in any survey until 1994. At that time a poll was carried out for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Libya did not rate a specific question but was included in a list of countries for respondents to consider as "the greatest threat" to American national security. A decade later, in 2004, Libya's relevance had faded even further. The same organization's survey on *American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* did not mention Libya even once in its 60 pages.³⁰

Following the military campaign against Iraq in 1991, Libya clearly began to recede as a perceived threat for American people. The 1994 poll showed that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was now much more of a preoccupation for the American public. Interestingly, Iran still figured highly as a threat, despite its much less confrontational stance towards America at the time and its own antipathy towards Iraq as Table 1 shows.

Thereafter Libya barely figured in American public opinion. The country did not appear in another Gallup survey until 2001 when a mere four percent of respondents named Libya as the United States' greatest foreign enemy. In 2005, 2006 and 2007, Libya did not even score above the minimal 0.5 percent to rate a mention in the poll results on this question. Indeed, it is amusing to note that in 2005 and 2006, France

actually rated higher than Libya in American opinion as the ‘greatest enemy’ to the United States.³¹

Table 1: Perception of threats to the USA

*In your opinion, which ONE of the following countries represents the greatest threat to the national security of the United States today: [READ AND ROTATE] Russia, China, India, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Germany, or Japan?*³²

COUNTRY	Percent
Iraq	40.73
North Korea	35.78
Iran	31.12
China	29.21
Russia	20.56
Japan	14.46
Libya	11.61
Germany	3.49
India	1.40
Other (voluntary)	0.91
Don't Know / Refused	6.38

However, the same polls showed that while Libya was not considered a significant threat or enemy by Americans, the state and its leader were consistently viewed in a very negative light. As mentioned above, at the height of the Libyan confrontation, Qaddafi scored a ‘cold or unfavorable’ rating of over 83 percent. In early 2001, 75 percent of Americans surveyed still had a negative opinion of Libya.³³ The North African state and its leader were therefore still the subject of much dislike from

American people, though the threat Libya posed was seen as negligible. However, by the following year, and with the 9/11 attacks having occurred, attitudes towards Libya had begun to soften, or at the very least, be forgotten.

Libya's upward trend in terms of public perception post-9/11 is mainly due to a rise in the percentage of respondents with a 'favorable' or 'mostly favorable' view of Libya. In some years the number of respondents with 'no opinion' of Libya also makes a contribution to the reduction of the negative perception total. For example, in 2006, the percentage of respondents with 'no opinion' of Libya (20 percent) equaled that of the respondents who had a favorable view.³⁴ Given that many young American adults will have never known Libya as an enemy, this trend will likely increase.

Gallup did not include Libya in its Greatest Enemy poll for 2007 ruling out any examination of public opinion following Libya's formal reconciliation with America.

With this overall downward trend in mind, how does the Libyan experience with American public opinion then compare to that experienced by other perceived enemies?

LIBYA OVERLAPPED

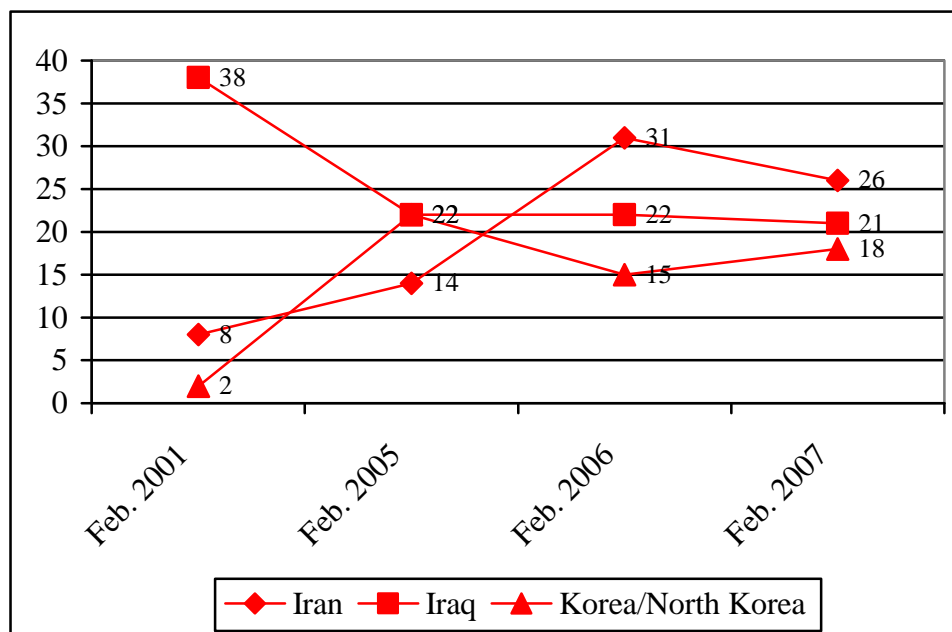
The Axis of Evil speech of January 2002 did not have any immediate or dramatic effect on public opinion about Iraq, Iran and North Korea. A Gallup poll the next month showed little difference in the numbers of people with a negative perception of Iraq or Iran when compared with the same poll a year earlier. North Korea though

rated a five percent increase in the number of respondents with a “mostly unfavorable” view.

Over the next two years public opinion of the Axis of Evil troika became much more unfavorable. North Korea in particular leapt in its “mostly unfavorable” rating from 27 percent in 2002 to 53 percent in 2003. Iran and Iraq also showed large increases, though in Iraq’s case ratings tended to fluctuate according to American military outcomes at the time.

In terms of perceived enemies, just prior to the Axis of Evil speech Iraq was identified most frequently by Americans as the United States' greatest enemy in the world. As of February 2001, 38 percent named Iraq, followed by China in distant second with 14 percent. Figure1 shows changes in American perceptions of the Axis of Evil.

Figure1: Trends in Perception of "Axis of Evil" Countries as "Greatest Enemy"

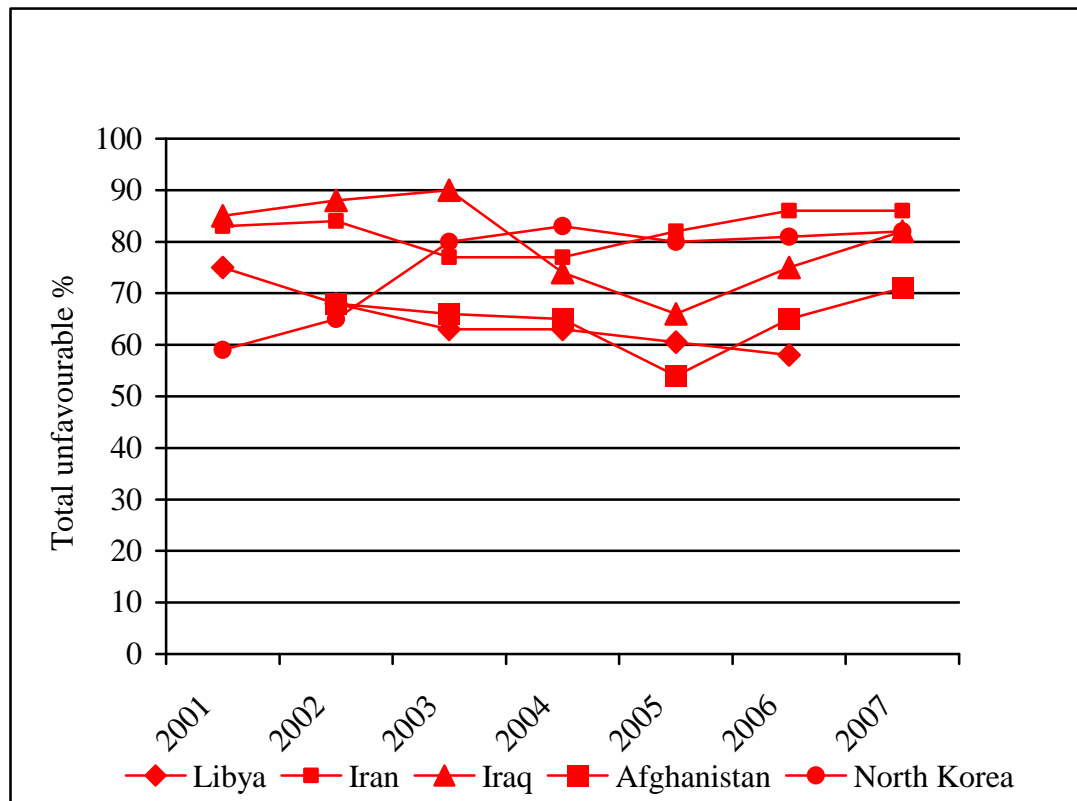


By 2005, two years after the United States toppled Saddam Hussein, the percentage naming Iraq as the greatest enemy had fallen to 22 percent. In the two subsequent years of Gallup polling, it remained around that level. The sectarian violence in Iraq and the ongoing American military engagement there is undoubtedly contributed to the sense that Iraq is perceived as the greatest enemy, even though the new Iraq government is ostensibly an ally of the United States.

Korea (*sic*) or North Korea was mentioned as the United States' greatest enemy by only two percent of Americans in 2001. In 2005, this figure had swelled to 22 percent, and it has continued to remain high. Similarly, relatively few Americans (eight percent) thought of Iran as the United States' top enemy in 2001. This was slightly higher (14 percent) in 2005, but then jumped to 31 percent in 2006. At 26 percent, the proportion of Americans tagging Iran as the top enemy today is substantial.

The increased negativity toward or perceived threat of the Axis of Evil countries by the American public seems to have supplanted Libya's infamy. In the most recent Gallup Poll on the "Greatest Threats to World Stability"³⁵ Libya did not rate a mention but Iran topped the list. Iran's rise is an interesting comparison to Libya as it emerged as an enemy and a rogue at about the same time and is still an independent enemy and rogue. As described above, in the Reagan years the two countries were often intrinsically linked in public perception and presidential rhetoric regarding the Middle East. Of course, the American view might be that Iran has become more 'evil' over time, whilst Libya has been improving its behavior. This is likely reflected in the public opinion statistics. The two countries are statistically close for unfavorable ratings in 2001, but then drifted widely apart over time.³⁶ (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: American Perceptions of Foreign Countries



LEARNING FROM LIBYA

The current crop of Rogue States - Cuba, North Korea, Syria and Iran - all have leaders which have been demonized in the same way that Qaddafi and Ayatollah Khomeini were in the 1980s. So how can Fidel Castro, Kim Jong Il, Bashar al-Assad and the Iranian leadership learn from the example of Qaddafi and the American public's apparent pardon of Libya? There may certainly be lessons worth trying to emulate if the other option is military invasion and regime change; not just for those in power, but for their people and indeed the citizens of the rest of the world as well.

American foreign policy tends to focus on the leadership of a Rogue State and demonizes the resulting construct through a variety of channels. Rhetoric from

American leaders focuses on the criminality, evil, stupidity, insanity, anti-democratic tendencies and links to global terror and WMD of any chosen enemy. Moreover, specific issues tend to be bundled together and mixed in with unrelated concerns. In some cases, outright untruths are offered as rationales for being opposing some states and leaders.

It is not surprising that American public opinion tends to reflect this portrayal of rogues. The link between disapproval of a state and support for military action against it is strong, both in theory and in practice. However, once military action is taken, and/or should the state drop from the American 'hit list' for a time, the public seem quick to forget their animosity and move on to a new *bête noire*. The rogue state's leader, however, may remain subject to longer term loathing.

It is important to note that merely being labeled as a rogue (or indeed not being so labeled) is not necessarily the key to opprobrium from the American public. The Syrians, for example, seem to be viewed more positively than most rogues in Gallup surveys; they certainly score on a par with America's ally, Saudi Arabia. This could be explained by the fact that the volume of rhetoric specifically leveled at the Syrians seems appreciably less than that directed at other rogue states over the years, as well as the fact that Syria has been less implicated in direct violent confrontation with the USA. Cuba fares even better. On the other hand, North Korea, whilst avoiding military action, still receives a lot of disparagement from the American government and remains very high on the list of most negatively viewed countries each year. North Korea's *actual* nuclear capability might be a possible reason for this perceived threat. Meanwhile, China, never a rogue and a key trading partner is a perennial low

scorer in Gallup polls of public perception. (China was viewed more negatively than Venezuela, Jordan or Russia in the 2007 poll.)

Being geographically removed from the epicenter of the Middle East may also help to avoid long-term dislike from the American public (again with the exception of North Korea). Libya's geographical distance from the Israel-Iran-Iraq nexus ensures there are no Golan Heights type issues and no infiltration of insurgents across its borders. Left alone in North Africa the risk of drifting into confrontation with America is easier for Qaddafi to control. This geographical isolation has assisted Sudan as well. Despite Sudan being officially listed by the U.S. State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism and the situation in Darfur, perceptions of Sudan are not even polled by Gallup.

Democratic practices and human rights records seem to have very little effect on how the American public reacts to rogue states. Libya remains an autocracy, very likely a dynastic one in the making. Despite some token releases of political prisoners at the time of Libya's official *rapprochement* with the USA, there is evidence to suggest that many of those liberated were quietly re-arrested soon afterwards.³⁷ Libya's human rights record in the time since the country's international reintegration is severely criticized by both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.³⁸ 39 Given the undemocratic situation in Pakistan at the time of writing and its own track record in human rights, it certainly appears that democracy and due process are not the key to being reformed as a rogue or affecting American public opinion.

CONCLUSION

The American public's perceptions of Libya have changed over the last 20 years. Once viewed as a great threat and a principal sponsor of global terror, Libya quickly became an irrelevancy for the creators of opinion polls and apparently for the public too. The emergence of Iraq as an enemy and America's continued antipathy towards Iran have all but erased Libya as a subject for survey. When it is surveyed, Libya is no longer seen as a principal enemy or threat. However it is still one of the more negatively viewed states.

Unsurprisingly there is a correlation between negative opinion of a country and whether American forces are involved in military action there. The public opinion nadir for Libya occurred at the same time as its principal clashes with America. Very quickly after these clashes ceased, public opinion began to ameliorate. Only a short time after that, Libya was not even considered a topic for regular survey, whilst the new *bête noire* of Iraq had emerged to take its place. The current tractability of Libya over WMD and renunciation of terrorism will likely see a further improvement of American public perception. However it is important to note that this statistical trend had begun long before.

With the recent tendency to leave Libya out of foreign relations polling, charting public opinion of Libya via Gallup polls is likely to prove difficult for the foreseeable future.

The example of Libya and its public opinion journey is relevant to other states currently considered rogues and enemies by the USA. Libya is a clear case of a once-despised enemy moving towards a position of, if not warmth, then at least

ambivalence from the American public. Whilst aspects of geography and its apparent co-operation in the War on Terror have undoubtedly helped Libya's public image, the country is still relatively unchanged from the years when it took on Reagan-era America. It has undergone no fundamental democratic or human rights reform of the sort that is often demanded by America of its opponents. It does admittedly seem unlikely that Iran or North Korea might one day conceivably follow Libya's path into insignificance for American people. However, in the mid-1980s as the bombs struck Tripoli and ships sailed across the "Line of Death" it would have seemed just as unlikely that an American Secretary of State would one day be lauding Libya as a new and responsible friend.

Sally Totman is a lecturer in Middle East Studies at Deakin University, Australia.

Mat Hardy has a background in television and new media production. He is a Research Assistant at Deakin University, Australia and PhD candidate at Monash University, Australia.

1 Gallup Poll. *Survey: International Terrorism*. April 17-18, 1986. Question 2: "Do you approve or disapprove of this week's U.S. military action against Libya?" 1220 respondents. Results: Approve (71.01 percent), Disapprove (20.96 percent), Don't know/No answer (8.03 percent).

2 Gallup Poll. *Survey: International Terrorism*. April 17-18, 1986. Question 4: "In your opinion, what role does Libyan leader Muammar Kaddafi play in international terrorism: Is he the CHIEF sponsor of international terrorism, ONE OF A NUMBER of Mideast leaders who sponsor terrorism, or NOT a sponsor of terrorism?" 1220 respondents. Results: Chief sponsor (30.51 percent), One of a number (60.81 percent), Not a sponsor (0.58 percent), Don't know/No answer (8.10 percent).

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- 5 Gallup Poll. *Survey: Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs*. February 6-9, 2006. Question 22n: "Next, I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. How about your overall opinion of -- Libya -- very favourable, mostly favourable, mostly unfavourable, or very unfavourable?" 1003 respondents. Results: Very favourable (1.97 percent), Mostly favourable (20.27 percent), Mostly unfavourable (41.80 percent), Very unfavourable (15.91 percent), Don't know (19.08 percent), Refused (0.96 percent).
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- 14 *Ibid.*
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- 16 *CRS Issue Briefing for Congress on Libya* - Updated 2 May 2005. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/47065.pdf>
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