

Leif-Eric Easley, "With U.S. or Against U.S.?: America's Image Problems with Allies and Rogues," *JoongAng Daily* (with *International Herald Tribune*), October 16, 2006, page 7.

United States foreign policy is falling short of its objectives, in part because of the way America is perceived throughout the world. Since the Iraq War, the cooperation of many governments with Washington has been constrained by negative public opinion of the U.S. It is easy for leaders to use anti-American sentiment to their political advantage, and potentially costly for them to resist. This is true for democracies where leaders face elections, but is also true for non-democracies where leaders must retain some air of legitimacy or face domestic unrest. Either way, working with the U.S. has become a greater political risk or liability for many governments, even when such cooperation is in a country's national interest.

The United States should be focused on changing this dynamic by countering perceptions that America is selfish and unilateralist. Succeeding in this requires that U.S. foreign policy do more to treat allied populations as constituents. This does not mean Washington should let others write its foreign policy or sacrifice national interest for international popularity. But in considering various policy options at its disposal, America can place greater priority than it does now on how policies will play out on Main Streets across the globe. It is not enough to lead and expect others to follow. It is not enough to engage in public diplomacy advocating the American position. It is necessary for Washington to conduct foreign policy in a way that carefully and visibly considers the interests and voices of America's international friends.

Rogue regimes present a different problem. Whereas it needs to be easier for allies to go with America, it needs to be more difficult for states of concern to go against it. This again involves U.S. international image. But presenting the North Korean and Iranian people with the American view and improving U.S. policy in their eyes will be ineffective in the short term. Helping those populations embrace democracy and openness and seeing their opinions positively affect their governments' actions is an important long-term goal. But the more immediate concern is making criminal and destabilizing behavior increasingly costly for rogue regimes.

Despite the unparalleled military and economic might of the United States, Washington's diplomatic influence is significantly hampered by the situation in Iraq. The swift defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime might have increased American credibility, for acting on its security concerns and enforcing resolutions the United Nations was unwilling or unable to enforce. But a political solution to insurgent violence in Iraq remains elusive and the U.S. is perceived as bogged down. As a result, Washington's warnings and demands have lost credibility with North Korea and Iran. Since the U.S. lacks significant economic relations with these countries, it is difficult for Washington

alone to impose costs for their bad behavior. Doing so is like trying to crush water only to see it escape through the fingers of a closing fist. America needs a more air-tight strategy for dealing with states of concern, involving reform of U.S. foreign policy image.

Washington should withhold signaling willingness to use force against North Korea and Iran. This does not mean taking anything "off the table" or reducing military capability. But America should recognize that increasing military threat level is no longer useful in deterring states once they have reached a point of being over-deterred. North Korea and Iran are past worrying about being crushed by the United States; instead they are focused on escaping between its fingers. Pyongyang and Tehran have become experts at exploiting differences between the U.S. and its allies. They have learned how to use negotiation to receive bribes and buy time, and then go on to cheat agreements. In addition, they are learning from each other, together testing the limitations of global powers and institutions, and seeking what effectively amounts to most favored rogue status.

The attacks on September 11th may have called for cowboy diplomacy to immediately take the fight to al Qaeda. But as the War on Terror continues and progress in Iraq is slow, U.S. foreign policy needs to elicit more cooperation from allies and confront threats with a long-term strategy. To the Bush administration's credit, it has tried to constrain North Korea and Iran through international financial and legal channels and developed novel negotiation mechanisms such as the Six-Party Talks to widen the sphere of accountability for dealing with rogue states. But the gaps between allied positions are still too large, allowing other countries to paint America as the bad cop, and even as a dirty cop that skirts international norms and conventions. To counter this, the U.S. should maintain the sticks necessary for deterring aggression by North Korea and Iran, but speak a little softer. Making less threats and more robust coalitions will allow the U.S. to regain its credibility. This in turn will limit North Korea and Iran's ability to slip through the cracks and further avoid meeting their international commitments.

Washington's options for dealing with North Korea's nuclear test and Iran's uranium enrichment are limited because U.S. foreign policy suffers from a dual image problem. Washington has lost moral authority in the eyes of its friends and lost credibility in the eyes of its opponents. But America still has the qualities and capabilities to be a trusted and credible superpower. It is entirely possible for the U.S. to regain an international image commensurate with its foreign policy goals. What is necessary is a change in approach. "You are either with us or against us" is not a policy but a provocation. Making it easier for allies to go with the United States, and making it more difficult for rogue regimes to go against it, is a strategy that can rescue American foreign policy from itself.

Leif-Eric Easley is a Ph.D. candidate in Government and International Relations at Harvard University and a member of the Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders Program.