

Who really created new 'axis of evil'?



By Lee Bon-young
Journalist

OPINION

The term "axis of evil" first appeared in January 2002, four months after 9/11, when George W. Bush used the phrase to refer to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea during his State of the Union address. Bush borrowed the word axis from the Axis Powers of World War II: Germany, Japan, and Italy. The Biden administration and the Democratic Party, however, rarely use the term. It would be stupid to borrow terminology from a Republican administration's attempt to cover up failed diplomacy.

Yet the conceptual framework for the "new axis of evil" was actually created by the Biden administration. The Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, began identifying China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as the US' principal threats in its introduction in 2021, the first year of the Biden administration. Before 2021, the report would list threats individually by region, as opposed to lumping multiple countries into a single category.

It seems as if failure to adopt the new terminology in the US solicits accusations of falling behind the times. John Aquilino, who served as the commander of the Indo-Pacific Command from 2021 to 2024, also used the term "axis of evil" this past March. Aquilino was

the first government figure to publicly adopt the term under the Biden administration.

You may ask what's the problem with referring to the aforementioned countries as an "axis of evil" or the "new axis of evil". But it's not so simple. Soon after Bush denounced the "axis of evil," war broke out in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The US also rattled the saber of a preemptive strike against North Korea, undoing progress that had been made with regard to North Korea's nuclear program. Conciliatory policies toward Iran suddenly took on a more hostile tone. The West harbors a religious worldview that divides the world into good and evil. In this worldview, evil is not something that can be negotiated with. It simply must be destroyed.

Another problem with this concept is that it fails to distinguish between individual countries within the axis, which makes it difficult to exploit such differences. Three of the four countries in the "axis of evil" possess nuclear weapons. This new axis of evil is much different from the one identified over 20 years ago. How can the West take on all four at once?

While an axis of evil may form on its own, it can often be created and fostered by the labels of the outside world. From the US perspective, they seem to be join-

ing forces and threatening the security of the world, but from their perspective, they have no choice but to join forces because they're condemned by the US. Instead of calmly and rationally approaching each individual issue, we revert to a mindset of "How dare you" and

risk making the mistakes of the past. I want to ask this question of the critics. If the war in Gaza, which has persisted for over eight months now, is not evil, what is it? If that is not evil, what is?

"new axis of evil" that the US is talking about comprises China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Republicans talk about it as if it were a given fact. Robert O'Brien, the national security adviser under former President Donald Trump, also called these four countries an "axis of evil" on CBS on Sunday, June 23. A Washington Post column called it an "alignment of evil".



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (2nd-R) make a joint statement after their summit in Pyongyang, North Korea, on June 19, 2024.
EPA

The article first appeared on Hankyoreh.

US labels challengers evil, overlooks Israel



By Rotimi S. Bello
Peace, conflict expert

OPINION

It must be noted that the term 'axis' existed long before this period; it started as early as the time before the Second World War (WW2) and the alliance of the German Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini, and the Japanese general Hideki Tojo. In fact, the term 'The Axis Powers' refers primarily to the three great powers of that time: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan. However, other nations joined the alliance during the war. The Axis Powers were united by common ideology and ambitions and therefore forged a military and political unity to aid one another in achieving their goals. The Axis Powers aimed to expand their territorial borders, to expand the global reach of their ideologies (in this case, Nazism and Fascism), and to challenge the established international order.

However, calling Iran, Iraq, and North Korea the "axis of evil" is a misnomer that unfairly stigmatizes these countries — it's like calling a dog a horrible name to hang it. Rather than calling them "axis of evil", they are axes of resistance to Western infiltration. The overt categorization of these nations ignores the peculiar conditions of each country and the complexities of geopolitical realities.

Although these nations have disagreed with the US and its allies on a few issues, such as nuclear proliferation, combining them under one

heading ignores their diverse histories, cultures, and geopolitical goals. For instance, Iran has a diversified population, a rich cultural history, a complex culture, and a thriving civil society. Contrariwise, Iraq saw much political turmoil, namely the Saddam Hussein regime overthrow and successive struggles for stability and the establishment of democratic governance. Nowadays, North Korea is a place widely known as isolated and belligerent. Nevertheless, it has its distinctive characteristics as a state with centralized government ideology under the Kim dynasty, a history of conflict with adjacent countries, the desire to have nuclear power, and one week of notification before the long-range ballistic missile test in breach of UN decrees.

In the real world, the use of such divisive language, like the "axis of evil," affects policy and diplomatic relations between countries. Policymakers are, therefore, ready to escalate animosity and shut down what could be very useful communication and diplomatic channels when they demonize entire countries. In fact, this kind of rhetoric can foment stereotypes that underpin international scepticism and hatred. Branding Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as members of an 'axis of evil' has served to create a storyline in which confrontation is the motivating ideology, and it is much more effortful to turn this

world into one of peaceful dispute and crisis resolution. The previous US administration, under President Trump, made quite a commendable effort in trying to establish rapport with Kim Jong Un, but by and large, that was to no avail. However, the subsequent Democratic government under Joe Biden seems not to have a well-organized diplomatic strategy but rather a confrontational one for complex world issues. Ukraine has not markedly made any advancement and is still wracked, despite heavy aid and cash assistance to become more self-sufficient under the influence of Russia. As a further note, the United States has been constantly condemned for its continued, and even increased, aid being sent to the administration of Benjamin Netanyahu, currently embroiled in the conflict in Palestine that has engendered such catastrophic destruction in Gaza, which some critics have even considered genocide, particularly on the part of the ruling Likud administration.

Summarily, designating North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as the "axis of evil" is a futile and harmful exercise in simplifying complex geopolitical realities and raising the temperature of states. In the process of solving the world's problems and promoting peace and stability, politicians must make it their business to seriously engage in constructive interaction, dialogue,

and diplomacy, rather than fanning the flames of provocative rhetoric and demonising whole communities. The importance of fostering international understanding and cooperation has never been felt as it is today in the interconnected and interdependent world. This would mean dispensing with the old terminology and going in for a far more nuanced and pragmatic approach to the management of international affairs.

The full article first appeared on Businessday NG.



US President George W. Bush (front) smiles while delivering his second State of the Union address in Washington on January 28, 2003.
PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/GETTY IMAGES