The Axis of Rogues

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Felix Heuner



What is the Axis of Rogues?

Recently, the term "axis of rogues" has gained new prominence, with the Eurasia group calling it one of the biggest threats of 2024. But what does this axis of rogues actually mean?

Today, the term is most frequently used to describe the close economic and military cooperation between Russia, Iran and North Korea, who are often described as "rogue states". These rogue states are considered dangerous to other nations because they do not abide by the rules of the international order. Asymmetric warfare, support of insurgent groups or

large-scale cyber-attacks are some examples of how the Axis of rogues tries to undermine the Western-led international order.

What does the Axis of Rogues do?

In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the axis of rogues has developed into an important lifeline for Russian military supplies. Because North Korea and Iran are already heavily sanctioned by the West, they have little to lose and much to gain by supporting Russia militarily in its war of aggression.

Iran supplies Russia with Shahed kamikaze drones that are produced cheaply and then used to attack Ukrainian cities and infrastructure. In return, Russia is helping to modernise Iran's outdated air force and gives it diplomatic support for its nuclear program at the United Nations.

North Korea has started to supply Russia with artillery shells. South Korea, the democratic neighbour and rival of North Korea, estimates that already around two million artillery shells have reached Russia from North Korea. In return, Russia seems to be helping North Korea with advanced technology in the satellite sector. North Korea succeeded in launching its first military satellite into space after the commencement of military cooperation with Russia.

How does China fit into the Axis of Rogues?

China is usually not considered a part of the axis of rogues, and that is for good reason. China is not heavily sanctioned by the West or considered a pariah state like North Korea or Iran. Instead, it is closely integrated into international trade and by some measures already the largest economy in the world. It is also not openly financing insurgent groups or waging asymmetric warfare against the West.

However, China's relations with the Axis of rogues have always been close and have got closer since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Xi Jinping announced a "no-limits friendship" with Vladimir Putin before he started his war of aggression. China serves as the most important lifeline for Russia, with trade having increased by 64% between the two countries since the start of the war. Furthermore, China is apparently supplying Russia with dual-use goods that can be used to manufacture advanced weapons in Russia.

Recently, the UK defence minister accused China of sending lethal weapons to Russia for the first time since the start of the war. Interestingly, this claim was rebuked by the US, which said that there was no evidence for the supply of lethal weapons. Considering that the UK and the US have a shared system of intelligence gathering through the "five eyes" intelligence alliance, this discrepancy is interesting. Should the claim of the British defence minister be confirmed in the future, this would mean an escalation

of cooperation between China and Russia and a serious danger to the Ukrainian defence resort.