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# Interview - Paul Rogers

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Paul Rogers is Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University. In the past forty years Professor Rogers has worked on aspects of international security, including North-South relations, resource conflict, weapons proliferation and problems of political violence. He lectures frequently at other universities and is also a regular lecturer at defence colleges, including the Joint Services Command and Staff College and the Royal College of Defence Studies. He has given oral and written evidence to House of Commons Select Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defence and was Chair of BISA, 2002-04. Professor Rogers has published 28 books and well over 150 papers. His main research interest concerns trends in global security and the changing causes of conflict, especially in relation to socio-economic divisions and environmental constraints. Professor Rogers is international security advisor to the Oxford Research Group and is international security correspondent for www.opendemocracy.net, one of the world's leading international affairs web journals.

**Where do you currently see the most exciting research/debates happening in your field?**

In rethinking our overall attitudes to international security and challenging the consistent failure of current approaches. The challenges of climate disruption and the marginalisation of the majority of humankind relative to the growth of transnational elites mean that we risk moving into an era of revolts from the margins within in an embittered world order. Following the Neolithic and Industrial transformations we are now entering the third human transition of moving towards a properly sustainable and emancipated world order. To achieve this will be a big "ask" and should be at the centre of IR thinking.

**How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?**

I've had an odd career, starting in the biological sciences and working in East Africa in the late 1960s on a regional crop research programme, then teaching environmental science for the best part of a decade followed by a move into peace research through an interest in environmental security. This probably means taking a broader interdisciplinary approach than is common, even to the extent of seeing the main IR theories as means to an end, almost a "canteen" approach. In the mid-1960s I was heavily involved in development activism, and much of this was then informed by working abroad, especially in Uganda. In terms of direct influence I would probably go for the work of Barbara Ward in the 1950s and 1960s, not least her remarkable book with Rene Dubos, *Only One Earth: the Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet,* (1972).

**Written 18 months before 9/11, your book *Losing Control* argued that the "traditional" method of dealing with insecurity through military power, referred to as the "the control paradigm", would fail to deal with threats in an increasingly fragile and unpredictable world. Historically, where do the origins of this approach by states to dealing with security threats lie? Was the "control paradigm" ever an effective approach?**

It has developed over many centuries but became even more entrenched during the Cold War years. The more recent growth of what is best termed the military-industrial-academic-bureaucratic complex has been an added factor, greatly aided by the profitability and relative unaccountability of transnational armaments corporations with

very considerable lobbying power. The extent to which the control paradigm was ever effective is arguable, but it has been an abject failure since 9/11.

**How did military and security thinking shift following the War on Terror? Were any real lessons learned?**

Remarkably little change in outlook or approach, the capacity of the system to carry on regardless never ceases to surprise me. Since the start of the appallingly misguided and counterproductive war on terror we have had seventeen years of war leading to hundreds of thousands of people killed, millions displaced and countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya wrecked, yet we still persist with the view that there is no other way. The approach is appropriately termed "liddism" – keep the lid on problems rather than seek properly to understand their nature.

**Largely because of the War on Terror's failings and the need to find alternatives to this approach, you outlined the concept of Sustainable Security. What does Sustainable Security mean and how do you feel its priorities have changed over the past decade, if at all?**

The term was originally promoted by Chris Abbott when he worked at Oxford Research Group, a defence and security think-tank, in the mid-2000s and it argues that "we cannot successfully control all the consequences of insecurity but must work to resolve the causes. In other words, 'fighting the symptoms' will not work, we must instead 'cure the disease'. Such a framework must be based on an integrated analysis of security threats and a preventative approach to responses." While combining elements of the common security and human security approaches it emphasises the issue of long-term consequences and it is in this sense that it seeks to add an additional dimension. It first developed around fifteen years ago in the context of ORG's argument that the War on Terror was proving an ongoing disaster, and this argument holds even more now. In addition, though, the evidence of socioeconomic divisions and environmental constraints and their combined impact on security was a core part of the approach from the start, *Global Responses to Global Threats* being an early contribution back in 2006.

**In your most recent book, *Irregular War: The New Threat from the Margins* (2017) you discuss this rise of Islamic State as part much wider phenomenon of generic revolts from the margins. How and why do these revolts represent a far more significant transformation of security challenges than the "War on Terror" that followed the 9/11 attacks?**

Because they are rooted in the twin global phenomena of socio-economic divisions and environmental limitations, they do not have quick military solutions and they require fundamental changes in our thinking on security.

**What is "remote warfare" and how effective has it been in defeating threats such as Islamic State?**

The term is used to describe military operations that are conducted primarily at a distance rather than utilising significant numbers of ground troops. They include the use of stand-off fire-and-forget weapons (e.g. air- and sea-launched cruise missiles) and armed drones but also extend to the wider use of Special Forces and private military corporations. They minimise the "body-bag" issue and tend to have much lower visibility and therefore political accountability than more open operations. It is too early to relate this to ISIS but the indications (as of May 2018) are that it is now transiting back to guerrilla warfare in Iraq and Syria while extending its connections, especially in northern Africa and Afghanistan. The main group working on this issue in the UK is the Oxford Research Group's Remote Warfare Programme which is publishing some of the most interesting work in international security studies.

**How similar has Trump's security strategy been to approaches of the past?**

The early signs are that it is more similar to the Bush presidency than Obama but with a stronger domestic orientation. This, coupled with notably hawkish security advisors and an unpredictable president, suggests considerable uncertainty in responding to security challenges with a tendency towards a strengthened use of the control paradigm.

**You've identified the years 1945-2045 as potentially the most crucial century in human history. Why is**

**this period so pivotal for humanity and are there any grounds for optimism regarding the future of our species?**

It is in this period that humankind has to come to terms with two great challenges. One is learning to control the ability to wreak huge destruction through the use of weapons of mass destruction and the second is exceeding the homeostatic capacity of the global ecosystem to handle anthropogenic impacts. In terms of the former we survived the Cold War much more by luck than judgement and there is still much to be done, not least in the era of Trump and Putin. As to the latter, there are some indications of progress but the rate of that progress, especially in the pace of radical decarbonisation, has to increase.

**What is the most important advice that you would give to young scholars studying International Relations?**

Avoid concentrating on any one theoretical perspective and always retain your critical faculties, whatever the attraction of safe answers. This may slow your career progression but will make for a much more fulfilling intellectual life, especially if you are prepared to engage outside the academy.

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*This interview was conducted by Alasdair Mckay. Alasdair is an Editor-at-large at E-IR.*