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Review Article

Confused Britannia: Global Uncertainty and Homeland Insecurity

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Paul Rogers, *Global Security and the War on Terror: Elite Security and the Illusion of Control* (Routledge: London, 2008), 230 pp.

Paul Wilkinson (ed.), *Homeland Security in the UK: Future Preparedness for Terrorist Attack since 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2007), 417 pp.

It is something of a cliché these days to begin a survey of the contemporary security environment by claiming that terrorism is the defining feature of the times. Few would dispute that it has been an academic and journalistic growth industry over the past seven years, a far cry from the decades prior to 9/11 when the cutting edge of international relations scholarship dedicated itself to the post-national construction of universal peace and consigned terrorism studies to the academic margins. By a curious irony, scholarship has moved from the transformation of the norms of the international order to “critical terrorism studies” without missing a beat or a government funding opportunity.

The appearance of two recent works, Paul Rogers’s *Global Security and the War on Terror* and Paul Wilkinson’s edited volume on *Homeland Security in the UK* affords an opportunity to evaluate the current British understanding of the subject. Given the United Kingdom’s long experience of domestic terrorism of the Irish Republican variety from the 1970s through to the 1990s, its involvement in the so-called global war on terror that has seen it participate in coalitions of the willing in Afghanistan and Iraq, and its shocked

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response to home grown Islamist-inspired assaults and the exposure of subsequent plots after 7 July 2005, one would anticipate U.K. scholarship on the subject to be both thoughtful and insightful. Is this, in fact, the case?

Both works examined here consider the threat posed to the security of West by the emergence of Al Qaeda and its strategy of asymmetrical warfare. Here, however, the similarity between the two books ends. While Wilkinson's work attempts to assess the implications for British security of Al Qaeda's commitment to mass casualty terrorism, Rogers construes Al Qaeda merely as a symptom of an evolving global dialectic dating from the Cold War where, Rogers asserts, an otiose Western security paradigm confronts the oppressed masses of "the majority world" and suffers the countervailing consequences of that paradigm. Indeed, the disagreement between the two authors, both leading authorities in their respective fields of peace studies and terrorism and political violence, about the causes and character of international terrorism sheds an interesting and somewhat perplexing light on the current state of the academic study of terrorism in the United Kingdom post-9/11.

Within this essentially contested disciplinary domain, then, Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University and Global Security Consultant to the Oxford Research Group, "a small but extraordinarily innovative think tank working on a range of international security issues, but with a particular concern with sustainable security" (p. 3), views international terrorism post-9/11 as our fault. More precisely, Al Qaeda-style violence is either the "construction" of, or a reaction to, something called Western "elite power." Moreover, the "illusion" of elite control cannot be sustained and it is therefore advisable "to seek to evolve a system of sustainable security," "based more on justice and emancipation" (p. 3).

Of itself this is not an entirely new argument. Indeed, Rogers's work represents an extension of an emancipationist agenda, dating from the end of the Cold War that seeks to liberate the understanding of international relations from the strait jacket of superpower-dominated, realist power politics, and replace it with the idealist pursuit of transnational justice.¹ In fact, to read Rogers's work is to take a trip back in time to the end of the Cold War. Rogers selects, from his extensive oeuvre, a series of essays written between 1989 and 2006, adds an introduction and a seventeen- page conclusion covering the latest manifestations of the Western "illusion of control," and terms the resulting product a corrective to the prevailing "ethnocentric Atlanticism that otherwise so dominates the study of international security" (p. 5).

The problem, however, is that the somewhat arbitrary selection of essays adds little to our understanding of Al Qaeda (only cursorily and erroneously discussed on page 199). Yet he attempts to sustain and extend the emancipationist thesis to suggest that Al Qaeda is merely a countervailing reaction to a Western political and economic security hegemony. In doing so, Rogers affords minimal insight into what his preferred alternative of a "just and emancipated security paradigm" would entail. Instead, he embarks on a tangential argument, dissecting the failings of the NATO nuclear posture during the Cold War, which he maintains "we survived more by luck than judgement" (p. 30). This questionable assertion leads into a discussion of alternative, non-nuclear military options available during the Cold War. Rather than a U.S.-inspired nuclear posture, Europe, Rogers contends, should have adopted a "non-offensive" form of defense (p. 38), which would have involved ceding territory to a more powerful enemy in order to conduct a subsequent guerrilla warfare against enemy forces. Such a strategy, we are reliably informed, would "enhance the deterrent aspects of the suggested attrition defence since no aggressor would want to occupy a territory filled with scattered, hidden armed men and/or women" (p. 39).

Rogers does not care to explore either the cost of or the political implications for U.K. democracy of this putative People's Liberation Army of the United Kingdom approach to the Cold War threat environment, which would *inter alia* have required national conscription and the mass militarization of the citizenry (policies one suspects Rogers would instinctively find intolerable). More precisely, it is not clear how such a strategy is of any relevance to the current-day security environment of polymorphous violence, which in terms of military operations has, among other things, demanded recourse to rapid reaction forces in out of area war fighting, peace keeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian roles,² rather than the option of protracted people's war in the London Borough of Islington. Given that Rogers offers this "non provocative" approach as the basis for an alternative and more sustainable security strategy to deter the successors of Stalin and Mao, the more skeptical reader might pause to question Rogers's subsequent analysis of the post-Cold War security environment and his alternative prescription to the prevailing Western "control paradigm."

For Rogers the post-Cold War era was a time when the United States consciously set out to impose a "violent peace" through a "westernised world system" (p. 82). This violent peace, he contends, imposed a global economic "apartheid" via the promotion of open markets that created both a burgeoning economic divide between the rich "West" and the exploited poor of the "majority world," together with an unsustainable energy policy that entails the destruction of the "global ecosystem." This combination, he alleges, has "led to a crisis of unsatisfied expectations within an increasingly informed global majority of the disempowered" (p. 99).

The consequence of this violently imposed peace "is a deep and persistent bitterness at the attitudes of Northern states towards problems of the global environment" (p. 102). This global division between either the rich North and the poor South, or alternatively the West and the Rest, has exacerbated insecurity and is responsible for an emerging "axis of disagreement." What Rogers calls "prologue wars" like the Gulf War (1991), the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico in 1994, and "Algeria and South Lebanon in the 1990s" supposedly represent the first premonitory snuffing of the revolt of the globally oppressed against the injustice of the violent peace. Thus, the "Zapatista revolt is an example of an anti-elite rebellion exacerbated by the wealth poverty divide," whereas "the Gulf War was essentially a resource war" (p. 84).

In order to sustain this Manichean dichotomy between the rich West and the oppressed Rest, inconvenient facts are either ignored or tortured to fit into the procrustean ideological bed Rogers has built for them. One obvious inconvenient fact is, of course, the economic rise of Asia both during and since the Cold War as a result of the very economic liberalism and globalized markets that Rogers maintains signally failed "to deliver economic and social justice" (p. 204). Consequently, nowhere in the work does Rogers attend to the transformation of both the Indian and Chinese economies as a consequence of globalization or the emergence of Japan and Southeast Asia as modern, industrial economies during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, Rogers classifies utopian revolts like the Zapatistas, the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front, or the *Sendero Luminoso* of Peru as "prologue wars," that is, harbingers to the current post-9/11 global crisis, while analogously protracted guerrilla wars in Vietnam, Malaysia, or Indonesia, Rogers categorizes, *ex cathedra*, as "epilogue wars," a function of the process of European decolonization in Southeast Asia. Yet the reader is left with the worrying suspicion that prologue and epilogue wars are so characterized merely to justify Rogers's predetermined schema of Cold War and post-Cold War history, which owes little to rigorous theoretical formulation and robust empirical validation.

For at the heart of Rogers's understanding of "the illusion of control" lies a fallacy. The fallacy assumes that a variety of different political, economic, and environmental problems must, in some profound way, be related. Once exposed, this relationship would be available to a single universal solution. Rogers's self-appointed task, therefore, is to reveal this relationship and supply its radical and transformative solution. Thus, via a species of post-Marxist unmasking, Western capitalism is revealed as the cause of global crisis, whereas global economic and social justice is identified as its dialectical antidote. Or as Rogers explains, it requires the transformation of the current security paradigm and the creation of a new, more sustainable one. In fact if politics is the art of the possible, it would seem this radically utopian scheme would rule out any recognition that different problems might be amenable to different, piecemeal, and pragmatic solutions. So, for instance, it would be pointless to seek any solution to the Israeli–Palestinian issue that was not itself contingent on the transformation of the international system and the global political economy. In practice, Rogers's policy prescription is one of inaction that precludes the political resolution of any problem.

The consequence of this grand theoretical fallacy leads Rogers to the conclusion that the West and the Rest are locked into mutually destructive armed camps and that the only solution to the West's unsustainably imposed violent peace is the global embrace of a new paradigm. Yet, Rogers leaves the details of his new paradigm disturbingly vague. One does know, however, that it will be radically transformational and, beyond the promotion of an ill-defined global justice, will among other things require the transformation of the Middle East, the abandonment of market economics, and the reduction of carbon emissions in the developed, but not the developing, world.

Ironically, these are ends with which Al Qaeda, if the pronouncements contained in one of Osama bin Laden's recent videos are taken seriously, would have much in common. According to Osama's broadcast to the world on 7 September 2007, which ranged over issues as diverse as the evils of American imperialism, the importance of the United Nations, the immorality of nuclear weapons, who killed JFK, the wisdom of Noam Chomsky, and the failure to observe the Kyoto accords on climate change, he stated:

as you liberated yourselves before from the slavery of monks, kings, and feudalism, you should liberate yourselves from the deception, shackles and attrition of the capitalist system. . . . The capitalist system seeks to turn the entire world into a fiefdom of the major corporations under the label of "globalization" in order to protect democracy . . . the reeling of many of you under the burden of interest-related debts, insane taxes and real estate mortgages; global warming and its woes; and the abject poverty and tragic hunger in Africa: all this is but one side of the grim face of this global system.³

It is only perhaps when bin Laden maintains that the "infallible methodology of Allah, the most High" that requires "total obedience" to the "orders and prohibitions of Allah Alone in all aspects of life" that one supposes that Rogers and Al Qaeda might part company about the ultimate ends of global justice. But, frankly, who knows?

It comes as something of a relief, therefore, to turn to Paul Wilkinson's edited volume on *Homeland Security in the UK*. Wilkinson and his "project team" do at least recognize that Al Qaeda–style terrorism represents an actual existential threat to the security of liberal democracies like the United Kingdom. More precisely, Wilkinson considers it the "most dangerous international terrorist network in the history of modern terrorism." As he states in his concise chapter analyzing the Al Qaeda "network of networks," "its absolutist and

grandiose ideology pledged to recasting the entire international system and its record of mass murder of civilians” explain why it is such a serious threat (p. 29).

The project in question and upon which the edited volume is based, is “an updated report” of a study “funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC),” which examined “the preparedness of the UK for future terrorist attacks.”⁴ The volume falls into four parts: the first covers threat assessment; the second and, by far the longest section, considers U.K. preparedness since 9/11; the third section, which addresses civil contingencies and emergency responses, could easily have been accommodated in the second section; the fourth consists of Wilkinson’s ruminations on the international dimensions of homeland security.

This uneven structure perhaps reflects the fact that the work is a collaborative enterprise between the Mountbatten Centre for International Studies at Southampton University and the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St. Andrews University, which seem to have somewhat different understandings of the extent and seriousness of the threat. Yet not only is the structure of the volume uneven, the topics addressed within it reflect the research team members’ particular enthusiasms rather than any obvious organizing principle. Indeed, Wilkinson’s cursory introductory remarks on “theory and methodology,” and the decision to adopt “a holistic research framework” should have raised questions among the ESRC assessors about what such “holism” actually entails. Evidently they did not, and the consequences are readily apparent in this volume.

Thus, while Wilkinson identifies the clear and present danger presented by Al Qaeda and its ideology, that ideology is largely ignored in the remainder of the 404- page work. Tamara Makarenko does offer an account of the international terrorist groups operating in the United States and rightly observes that British authorities were woefully underprepared for home grown Islamism prior to 9/11. However, Makarenko offers nothing in the way of an analysis of the Islamist ideology driving these groups, or the source of its appeal to second- and third-generation British Muslims. Instead she offers a rather attenuated description of some of the radical groups and personalities working in the United Kingdom since the 1990s, which any interested student could acquire from a casual search of the Internet without the need for a taxpayer-funded ESRC grant.⁵

Meanwhile, her subsequent discussion of “immigration and asylum issues” (chapter 11) and their links to the perception of home grown terrorism among the wider public is distinctive only for its incoherence. For example, she argues that tabloid reports asserting such a link constitutes “a myth,” while in the same paragraph she admits that “some individuals arrested in counter terrorism operations throughout the UK gained entry as asylum seekers” (p. 248). Makarenko in her subsequent analysis never informs us how these two contradictory statements might be reconciled.

Elsewhere in the volume, one searches in vain for any significant examination of the relationship between the ideology and practice of Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda-influenced activists in the United Kingdom. Consequently, Jez Littlewood and John Simpson, in the threat assessment section of the book, offer a thoughtful analysis of the potential appeal of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) weapons to terrorist groups like Al Qaeda interested in mass casualty terrorism and draw an important distinction between the *interest* terrorists might show in CBRN weaponry and the *capabilities* they possess to manufacture or deploy them. Yet, while providing an informed and skeptical account of terrorist CBRN capabilities, their chapter offers no insight into the home grown mindset that would want to deploy such weaponry in British cities. This weakness becomes more apparent in Littlewood and Simpson’s subsequent chapter on the role of counter proliferation strategies in reducing the CBRN threat. Here the authors reach the somewhat

predictable conclusion that “arms control, disarmament and counter proliferation remain central to the overall approach to managing and reducing the CBRN threat” (p. 75).

However, Simpson and Littlewood also, and more controversially, maintain that Western democracies have overlooked the role of “governance” that involves “an appreciation of the role of norms, rules and means of order in the international community” in deterring CBRN terrorism. Yet, a moment’s reflection on the various messages transmitted by either bin Laden or his lieutenant Ayman al Zahwahiri since 9/11, or, for that matter, a perfunctory examination of the theory and practice of any revolutionary proponent of a strategy of political violence since the Jacobins instituted the first reign of terror in the modern political era, would soon conclude that the only norms recognized by what Wilkinson terms “incurable terrorists” are utopian, revolutionary ones. These norms require the total and violent overthrow of the conventional rules of international society. How greater attention to governance structures would address those who seek to destroy all such Western liberal structures of governance remains opaque.

While Littlewood and Simpson appear confused about deterrence in an age of polymorphous violence, Anthony Richards’s contribution to domestic threat perception seems irrelevant. Richards evaluates, somewhat superficially, the history, capability, and domestic threat posed by both the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and their affiliates and, no doubt for the sake of balance, that presented by the various Loyalist paramilitaries as well. Richards follows this descriptive account of the evolution of Irish terrorism since 2002 with an equally superficial account of animal rights activism. Given that neither the IRA nor the Animal Liberation Front constitute anything like the network of networks that Al Qaeda represents, the reader is likely to remain somewhat perplexed by their inclusion in what is a very long book without, apart from its commitment to holism, any apparent general thesis or argument.

Frank Gregory’s three-chapter contribution to the volume particularly evinces the lack of editorial direction. The catchy chapter titles include “National Governance Structures to Manage the Response to Terrorist Threats and Attacks: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis with Special Reference to the UK ‘Lead Department’ Response Structure and UK Counter-Terrorism.” The chapter that follows examines the strengths and weaknesses of the U.K. lead department versus the Homeland Security approach to domestic security (pp. 117ff) and concludes that the lead department strategy should be informed by a policy based on the “4 P’s” (prevention, pursuit, protection, and preparedness). That the government only arrived at this stunningly obvious insight sometime after 2003 should be an object of profound concern.

However, Gregory, it seems, considers it his scholarly duty merely to report faithfully the minutiae of government white papers rather than identify the causes of the sclerotic weakness both at central and local government levels that permitted and encouraged such a serious challenge to domestic peace and stability to evolve over two decades. Gregory’s subsequent and patchy survey of the structures adopted in Germany, the Netherlands, and comparable Commonwealth countries, Canada and New Zealand, to address homeland threats analogously reveals very little except that U.K. policy is “quite comparable with its EU counterparts” (p. 127). This, one suspects, might prove a source of no great comfort for U.K. citizens. Nor is the reader told why the Australian government, which has acted more robustly than most Western democracies to the threat to homeland security, particularly since 7/7, is omitted from the discussion of comparable Commonwealth countries. Ultimately, the tentative findings of this chapter have been largely overtaken by events with the government deciding to split the Home Office into two, belatedly recognizing that the

“lead department” approach has led the United Kingdom into the caring embrace of Al Qaeda and its sympathizers.⁶

Succeeding chapters by Gregory assessing intelligence-led counterterrorism and police and counterterrorism either summarize recent government reports in a dot point format or meander at great length to a blindingly obvious conclusion. In the process one gets thick description rather than informed analysis. Nor does Gregory aid comprehension even in this limited objective by his propensity to litter his discussion of central and local government departments and policing agencies with acronyms without citing their full title. Given that counterterrorism is such an acronymically rich domain, the absence of a glossary of terms represents a further flaw in the editing.

Finally, apart from several more thickly descriptive chapters on port security, cyber security, public information, and public sector roles, Wilkinson concludes the volume with his interpretation of the relationship between homeland security and well-crafted foreign policy. Here, Wilkinson raises some pertinent points about the domestic impact of the Iraq War. Wilkinson maintains that while not “suggesting that the Iraq conflict is the *sole* cause of Al Qaeda terrorism. . . it has undoubtedly *exacerbated* it” (p. 373, italics in the original). The first part of the proposition is evidently redundant as Al Qaeda attacks on Western targets clearly predated the ousting of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003. The second part of the proposition, elaborated elsewhere in Wilkinson’s discussion, maintains that “riding pillion passenger” to the United States has had three deleterious consequences for U.K. security:⁷ first, “in the recruitment and motivation of young Muslims in the UK” (p. 373); second, in considerably overstressing military resources in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and hence weakening homeland defense; and third, undermining the United Kingdom’s democratic credibility by conducting a foreign policy that “flatly contradicts our stated values.” The three claims deserve much deeper discussion than the five pages Wilkinson allocates them.

However, Wilkinson’s first point regarding the recruitment of British Muslims via Al Qaeda propaganda that makes use of images from the Iraq War seems far too important to be mentioned *en passant* in a book that purportedly addresses the motivational appeal of the network of networks and its threat to domestic security. But not only is the claim made in passing, it is also flawed. Even a brief exposure to the writings of former members of the British Jihadi network like Ed Husain’s *The Islamist*⁸ or Hassan Butt’s *Observer* articles reveals that the *jihadists* use any issue, from the permissiveness of liberal institutions to drugs, promiscuity, and alcohol to the treatment of minorities at home and abroad to drive an ideological wedge between the flawed character of secular democracy and the virtues of an ultimately Utopian Islamism. Notably, in the wake of the London bombings, and later Glasgow airport bombings in June 2007, Butt observed:

I remember how we used to laugh in celebration whenever people on TV proclaimed that the sole cause for Islamic acts of terror like 9/11, the Madrid bombings and 7/7 was Western foreign policy. By blaming the government for our actions, those who pushed the Blair’s bombs line did our propaganda work for us. More important, they also helped to draw away any critical examination from the real engine of our violence: Islamic theology.⁹

Of course, the British network would make use of the Iraq War but the logic of Wilkinson’s position, exactly as Butt suggests, ultimately draws attention away, as does the whole volume, from the real engine of home grown violence, namely, the ideology of Islamism, not the conduct of what Wilkinson considers a flawed foreign policy. It is not entirely clear

therefore how Wilkinson's preferred conduct of foreign policy would preserve stated values rather than destroy them.

In this respect, Wilkinson's analysis glosses over rather than reveals complexity. For instance, while Western intervention in Iraq has undoubtedly inflamed Islamist sentiment, this example ignores countervailing evidence that points in other directions. For instance, it was non—or at least very late and half-hearted—Western intervention in Bosnia that acted as the greatest radicalizing agent for *jihadism* pre-9/11. It was Western prevarication, not Western interference, that was felt to have left Muslims to suffer ethnic cleansing at the hands of the Serbs (and to a lesser extent the Croats), which given the scale of the killing, exasperated many Muslims around the world.¹⁰ Yet the reader does not receive any insight into such complexity. Overall, Wilkinson, like many commentators in the aftermath of the Iraq War, falls victim to a simple rationalistic paradigm of Western cause, Islamist effect. In this he would seem to share some commonality of outlook with Rogers. Deal with the cause (Western foreign policy), so the argument goes, and the Islamist response will be mitigated, if not disappear altogether. If only matters were that simple.

To conclude, on the one hand, analysis of the Rogers variety is over-determined by a radical pacifist agenda devoted to the transformation of the planet into a Green utopia that presents Al Qaeda as a symptom of a larger paradigm of Western design and an apparently legitimate, or at least understandable, response to global injustice. On the other, there is a public policy view of terrorism that, while recognizing the threat posed by Al Qaeda, refuses to take its ideology seriously and embarks on descriptive, tangential, and inadequately theorized analyses of capabilities, targets, and counterterror responses. Neither of these works can be considered templates for understanding Islamist-inspired violence either in its global or local manifestations. Given that these two works are the product of leading authorities in that strange subdiscipline of political science termed terrorism studies and represent the pinnacle of U.K. analysis in that field, the state of the discipline, like the outlook for U.K. homeland security itself, appears grim indeed.

Notes

1. See for example, Ken Booth, "Security and Emancipation," *Review of International Studies*, 17(4) (1991), pp. 313–326.

2. See Andrew Dorman, M.L.R. Smith, and Matthew Utley (eds.), *The Changing Face of Military Power: Joint Warfare in an Expeditionary Era* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

3. Osama bin Laden, video September 7, 2007, available at (http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/070907_bin_laden_transcript.pdf).

4. Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks Programme, ESRC. See Liz Ford, "ESRC Back Research Into Terrorism," *Education Guardian*, 11 September 2002.

5. The total grant for the specific UK Preparedness for Terrorism project was reputed to be £250,000 (\$ 500,000). See Ford, "ESRC Backs Research into Terrorism."

6. For a more incisive analysis of British bureaucratic and administrative machinery and its problematic nature see Charlie Edwards, *National Security for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Demos, 2008).

7. The damaging effects on U.K. foreign policy of "riding pillion passenger" was an early theme pursued in the ESRC project's research agenda. See Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson, "Riding Pillion for Tackling Terrorism is a High Risk Policy," *Security: Terrorism in the UK*, Chatham House/ESRC Briefing Paper 05/01, July 2005, p. 3. The publicity this paper received in the United Kingdom when it was first published was considerable and was highlighted in particular by the anti-Iraq war media to suggest that it was "self-evident" that "riding pillion on George Bush's

motorbike. . . has exposed Britain more than ever before to al-Qaida's fanatical enmity." See "The Iraq Connection," *The Guardian*, 20 July 2005.

8. Ed Husain, *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw and Why I Left* (London: Penguin, 2007).

9. "My Plea to Fellow Muslims: You Must Renounce Terror," *The Observer*, 1 July 2007.

10. For a discussion see Evan Kohlmann, *Al'Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).