

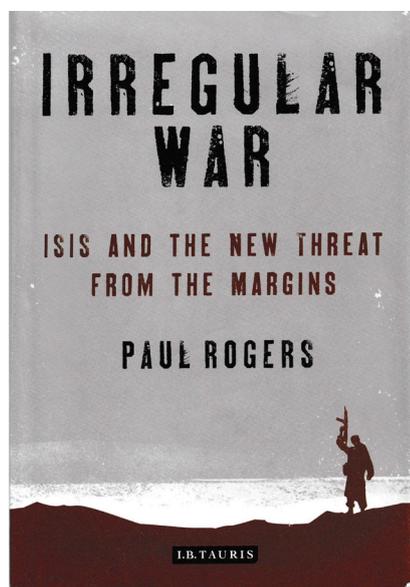
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BOOK REVIEW

IRREGULAR WAR: ISIS AND THE NEW THREAT FROM THE MARGINS

Autor: Paul Rogers. I.B.Tauris: Londres. 2016. 244 p. ISBN: 9781784534882



Paul Rogers: is Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University and International Security Editor for openDemocracy. He also writes a monthly briefing for the Oxford Research Group and is author of *Why We're Losing the War on Terror and Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-First Century*.

Book review

“Irregular War” is undoubtedly a book of interest for many reasons...above all else, due to the author’s academic profile, but as well for its realism and fine documentation. According to Paul Rogers, it is worthless to set out problems of Security and Defense, no matter how well described, if no effort is made to seek beyond the most obvious effects...The causes which bring about the current instability are typical of an end of cycle, and as such are much deeper and require a different treatment: **“Underlining the problems”**.

The need to establish a new and more detailed analysis of essential questions undoubtedly affecting global security must replace a vision which is too short-sighted and overly protectionist in the literal sense of the word. Otherwise, the risk is run of perpetuating an entire series of **“revolutions from the margins”** which will increasingly check-mate the Developed World, this being one of the principal theses of the book.

ISIS remains, according to the author, one part of a much broader phenomenon now defined: **“Revolution from the margins”**. Today it is the clash of civilizations between the West and Islam which prevails, but in fact this is an early manifestation of an upcoming future which he characterizes as **“the era of insurgencies”**, a concept much broader and deeper than the current cultural or religious differences in conflict.

The impossibility of containing the **“new insurgencies”** with conventional defense systems has already been proven in the last twenty years in the conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan. It is absolutely indispensable to deal, as soon as possible, with the true causes of this “growing insecurity”, and which are none other than those described in Paul Rogers’ book.

The consequences of economic globalization and the increase in social inequality have exacerbated problems already perceptible. In addition, the controversial climate change, together with Western failure to solve the war-like conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, have fomented, throughout wide areas of the planet, a feeling of frustration called by the author, to repeat, **“revolution from the margins.”**

The advanced societies, with a degree of wealth far greater in comparison with the huge **“marginalized majorities”** of the Global South, remain unaware of the grave “intrinsic instability” which threatens them.

One of the principal consequences of growing inequality has been the resentment which exists in the face of the frustrated prosperity of this area, in spite of a significant increase in the levels of healthcare and education. These, however, contrast with the

lack of opportunities for the growth and development of the population. Paul Rogers defines it as a “revolution of frustrated expectations”.

It is obvious that over the last century, especially since 1945, a very significant change has been produced in the concept of Global Security, given that nuclear armaments admit the concept of the self-destruction of mankind, totally or in part.

In addition, the proliferation in recent decades of nations possessing nuclear arms has increased the level of nuclear risk even more, a risk previously influenced only by the two major blocks. These days, a number of countries involved in serious local conflicts have at their disposition nuclear warheads, which undoubtedly contributes to greater uncertainty.

To what extent may we be facing an “existential threat” from a terrorist movement, such as is ISIS, having access to weapons of mass destruction? Paul Rogers dedicates an entire chapter of his book to this subject, proposing a realistic medium-term view in the face of revolutions similar to Islamic terrorism.

It is obvious that the psychological effect produced on the population by a terrorist attack using nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, even if not on a major scale, would be much greater than that of the direct impact itself, however brutal such might be.

The fact of losing control of a territory containing an industrial substrata, as well as experts qualified in the material, may facilitate access to this type of threat by terrorist groups.

Paul Rogers proposes that this type of risk and threat on the part of paramilitary or terrorist groups may significantly increase in the coming decades.

In an immediate future, it will be necessary as well to face the consequences of an economic globalization capable of generating growing inequality, affecting the concepts and values of the Western social model.

On the other hand, the effects of climate change seem now to be unquestionable, and in most studies, the timeframe foreseen by scientists within which environmental imbalances may become major problems for Global Security is set for the middle of the current century.

The controversial climate change, fruit of human intervention in the natural environment, will drastically affect the weakest countries of the Southern Zone, with grave migratory consequences, to be added to those produced by wartime conflicts.

Therefore, the economic and environmental parameters on which the Western World is based should not and must not perpetuate the underdevelopment of the areas of the Southern Zone. The principal causes of conflict should be faced and appropriately mitigated in the present, which is to say within the coming decades.

Spectacular technological advances and the significant progress in global communication without doubt increase awareness among currently marginal populations with respect to the aforementioned climatic and economic imbalances.

There is a greater generalized awareness of the ideal of correcting imbalances in the search for improvements which develop a safer and more balanced life: The concept “Sustainable Security”, just as Paul Rogers defines it.

Finally, military responses to “challenges from the margins” cannot continue to cause thousands of civilian victims and collective displacements, transferring the problems into other countries, and in addition failing to bring about the desired end to the conflicts.

Western countries have tried to defend, first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq and Syria, their own security, no doubt about it. Nonetheless, the spread of these conflicts into multilateral civil wars and failed States make obligatory at least a critical re-evaluation of the effort carried out in the overseas combat against terrorism.

The above-mentioned risk of a potential development of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups, the author adds, is one more argument for seeking a path towards a “truly sustainable world security system”.

Thus, the underlying theme of Paul Rogers’ book is none other than the advent of an era of “revolution from the margins”, fruit of a world economically divided and incapable of facing up to the environmental problems threatening major parts of it.

ISIS is a terrorist movement specific to its time, which may be countered and even destroyed, but which, once done away with, will be followed by others, also transversal and possibly having nothing to do with Islam, although with roots in whatever other ideology. It is what the author repeatedly refers to as the “era of insurgencies”, rejecting the current single-minded concept of a clash of civilizations.

The concept of security limited to the defense of local borders, or to the development of means of intelligence and information, without taking into account an international collaboration, will not suffice. Generalized problems will require lasting and global solutions to reduce their conflictive nature in the most under-developed or worst-administered areas of the planet, with the ultimate aim of protecting security and preventing terrorism in the West. One of the possible advantages of the Agencies of Intelligence and Security of Western countries is a certain acceptance today of the magnitude of the struggle against terrorism. Nations of the first order are susceptible to receiving indiscriminate attacks by small terrorist groups, many of them formed by local citizens, with very scarce resources, but having sufficient determination as to be willing to sacrifice even their own lives for the cause. This acceptance of the new reality has brought with it greater coordination among the forces of intelligence and of those of counter- terrorism in the different countries.

Greater awareness is appearing of the present and future potential of terrorist groups and of their capacity to create effects and consequences highly disproportionate to their size and apparent lack of scope.

Economic differences, the impact of new technologies and weapons of mass destruction, the forced displacement of millions of people as a result of climate change,

and the indiscriminate use of military forces on the part of Western powers, will increase the potential of marginalized groups, regardless of their size and seemingly minimal power: this is the global thesis of Paul Rogers' book.

ISIS has already demonstrated the impact of the digital revolution and its importance for the spread of any terrorist movement. The media connected to the internet greatly exceed the world population and there are projections which place their number at around 50 billion by the year 2050.

The potential future for the perpetration of cyber-attacks affecting world security has been greatly enhanced in recent years and several incidents have taken place which may transfer in the near future into the area of possible terrorist threats.

In the first half of the present century, Paul Rogers prognosticates the appearance of "varied insurgencies" against the developed countries, which form part of a privileged elite, inside a marginalized majority, this representing a much broader risk than the simple clash of civilizations.

Will the new armies, regardless of how well trained and equipped they may be, be able to stand up to such menaces as insurgency or massive immigration?

Will a simple policy of containment and border defense together with specific actions in territories of conflict, suffice to offer the West lasting solutions?

The next three decades will be decisive for countering the major instabilities and global menaces affecting us, according to the author, although the final chapter of his book, "A possible peace", ends on a certain note of optimism, given the demonstrated ability of humankind to adapt to change when circumstances so require.

Paul Rogers insists upon the imperative need for capable leadership in the developed countries, as well as for a profound analysis of the basic problems affecting the "**marginalized majorities**", pointing in his work to solutions which contribute to a greater worldwide development as a basis for Global Security.

Obviously, the concept of Global Security requires a new approach, permitting greater control of the most acute problems, improvement of world consensus and the use of a more measured coercive force. For this it is indispensable, the author insists, to have available a group of leaders at all levels of society, much more aware of the transcendence of the present situation and of the very grave consequences which may come with the defense solely of partial interests, in the face of such global conflicts.

Investment in diplomacy, security and cooperation on development and on the containment of climate change based on application of the new technologies, should facilitate the coming changes and assure the future of our planet. These are reforms which will improve our developing societies so that the "marginalized majorities" may be integrated, and do not represent a perpetual threat.

A conventional and defensive vision of Western Security will not be sufficient.

Margin note

On August 3, 2017, the Annual Conference of CIOR (*Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers*, in its French initials) was held in Prague.

This is an organization which integrates, as members in good standing, those reservist associations recognized by the Ministries of Defense of NATO countries, and with a different status, those friendly nations proposed by NATO in accord with its foreign policy. Jurisdictionally independent of NATO, it is recognized by and attached to the organization. It holds a recognized character as an advisory organ to the Military Committee and is furnished with an office and a Permanent Representative at NATO's IMS at the Brussels Headquarters. Apart from acting as a think-tank, it organizes many activities dedicated to such fields as training, debate, academia, military sports... See www.cior.net.

FORE (Federation of Spanish Reservist Organizations, in its Spanish initials). Created under the auspices of the Spanish Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1991, it is the Spanish member of CIOR and brings together the great majority of reservist associations existing in Spain. Its mission consists of promoting the development of the Reserve (in accord with the mandate of the MC NATO and in its broadest sense), coordination with the activities of its member associations, representation before the authorities, diffusion of and support for NATO policies and doctrines, and promotion of the relationship and camaraderie among Reservists at national and international levels.

Within the framework of the said Conference, an academic day is held, the CIOR Symposium, permitting debate on a number of topics related to the military reserves and their contribution to defense.

Specifically this year the Symposium 2017 set forth the following general theme:

“Utilization of Reserve Forces for the Fight against Terror”.

Symposium Relevance

Experts are willing to speak on the following subjects:

- Sustainable security and challenges 2018
- Intelligence and counter-terrorism
- CBRN Threats and their Evolution Cyber-security conflagrations and their repercussions

To develop the most academic perspective of the day, Professor Paul Rogers was originally going to make an appearance, author of the book reviewed above, “Irregular War:...”. In the end, his place was taken by Richard Reeve, current director of the think tank Oxford Research Group, founded by the said Paul Rogers, as the latter was unavoidably prevented from attending...

The majority of the statements and approaches set forth in the referenced Paul Rogers book were extensively covered at the CIOR Symposium by Richard Reeve, reiterating the imperative necessity for the identification of the roots of the numerous

current conflicts, not stopping at the most obvious symptoms such as violence, organized crime or radicalization.

Throughout the rest of the day, during which the Spanish speaker, Lt. General Francisco Gan Pampols, also gave an address (presenting an analysis of the major goals of Global Security from the perspective of Military Intelligence and the growing role of the Reservists), the great complexity of military tasks developed in a globalized world was made clear: The need to go beyond the threat of Conventional War itself is becoming ever more evident.

In order to continue to meet the majority of the challenges which armies will have to face in the coming years, close collaboration will be indispensable among the private, public and military sectors.

With respect to the field of Reservists, the majority of the speakers emphasized the growing role of this group within the military environment, given that the new challenges and menaces we are facing require ever greater specialization and types of knowledge which in are part acquired and developed today within the civilian world.

In the face of multilateral threats, a new model of military reservist is being implemented. This must be a more flexible model in every sense, and must set forth new concepts facilitating the intervention of the reservist group in a manner more productive for the armies.

In order to counter terrorism, cyber-attacks and in general all the new threats, some of them even existential (such as may be the weapons of mass destruction), it is necessary to hold new capacities, knowledge and experiences requiring greater specialization, which will involve greater support from the Reservist sector.

Finally, the increase in national resilience, one of the main objectives of NATO for the coming years, finds in the Reservists a privileged group for the performance of this role, within its own civilian environment and at the same time forming part of the military body.

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