

A War on Terror: Afghanistan and After

Paul Rogers

London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004. 210 pages.

If you have never read a Paul Rogers' article or book before, you will probably be wondering who he is and from what angle he is approaching the "war on terror." Paul Rogers is a professor of peace studies, as well as an international security correspondent who focuses upon trends in international conflict. More specifically, he examines western military responses to regional conflicts and political violence. It is with this intellectual background that he intends to analyze and understand what is happening in the Middle East (as events occur vis-à-vis "real time") and predict future implications of Bush's "war on terror" (p. 2).

This book is a compilation of articles that Rogers wrote from October 2001 to December 2002 as weekly columns for the *Open Democracy* web journal (www.openDemocracy.net). His choice to submit these articles to the web journal, which is neither media-controlled nor affiliated with any special interest group, is a provocative statement that clarifies his position on the media's "war on terror." That is, in the author's words, "media manipulation is easy" (p. 10) and comes "with little or no critical analysis" (p. 15).

After editing and refining his articles to prepare them for book form, Rogers divides the articles into seven chapters: Chapter 1: "War in Afghanistan – I," Chapter 2: "War in Afghanistan – II," Chapter 3: "A New American Century?," Chapter 4: "Consequences of War," Chapter 5: "Israel and Palestine," Chapter 6: "Winning or Losing?," and Chapter 7: "Endless War." He opens the book with a very brief "Introduction" and ends it with a slightly longer "Afterword."

With a closer look, it becomes evident from the chapter titles that underneath the motif of conflict several interrelated issues are presented throughout this book: the Bush administration's (strike first) political atti-

tude, the American reaction to 9/11 and its affects on global security, and – as any good analysis would offer – a diagnosis of the problem causing global tension and a possible solution thereof.

The argument that seems to permeate Rogers’ book is that,

... the US is failing to understand the root causes of the support for paramilitary organizations like al-Qaida and, in turn, is failing to offer any real solution for undercutting them and establishing real global security. ... Such a lack of understanding ... is a dangerous policy, not least because it is precisely the attitude that a group such as the al-Qaida network actively wants. (pp. 76-77)

This attitude is also dangerous because the United States thinks that the solution to the Middle East’s “terrorist problem” can be solved by “working with the elites of selected states, supporting Israel as the regional ‘watchdog,’ and applying US military force.” On the other hand, al-Qaida uses the same reasons to argue against elitist Muslim states and Washington’s heavy-handed policies in the Middle East. Thus, what the United States believes to be the solution is also the motivational drive for the development of organizations like al-Qaida.

In chapters 3 and 7, Rogers lays out the foundation of his argument. He contends that the neo-conservative Bush administration is a firm believer in the Project for the New American Century (www.newamericancentury.org), which suggests that American leaders “have the responsibility to preserve and extend an international order friendly to our (America’s) security, our prosperity, and our principles.” The problem with this is that it leads to a tendency of viewing international affairs only in terms of American interests and the outright refusal of the existence of an alternative solution to regional conflict other than an American-devised plan.

“The ‘majority world’ sees the US’ actions as going far beyond a legitimate war on paramilitary violence (“terrorism”) to constitute an attempt to dominate global affairs” (p. 163). And it is this attitude that organizations like al-Qaida depend on in order to bolster support for themselves and cultivate anti-American sentiment in the Middle East. Thus, in Rogers’ mind, in order for the United States to establish real security at home and abroad, it must rethink its geopolitical presence in the Middle East and its relationship with Israel.

Rogers’ argument and analysis of the Middle East conflict are compelling. He carefully threads his ideas together with rich details of ongoing events in the “war on terror.” In addition, he offers historical background

information for understanding the nature of the conflict. In short, *A War on Terror* is an informed analysis of the current state of affairs of a Middle East with an American military presence.

To conclude, I found Rogers' book very gratifying. Its only drawback is the absence of a bibliography. Considering that the book is a compilation of articles, this shortcoming could have been overlooked if full bibliographical references had been given in the text; some of the references given are incomplete. Despite these minor flaws, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in international relations (especially between Islam and the West), the phenomenon of fundamentalism, and conflict resolution.

Ja'far Muhibullah
Graduate Student, Department of Religion
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina