*Paul Rogers has been my go-to 'mentor' on peace and security issues since I first got involved in green politics in the early 1970s,* The Insecurity Trap *brings all his unique expertise, wisdom and integrity to bear on today's unprecedentedly disrupted world. And what an extraordinary 'reference library' he and Judith Large have created in the process.*
**Jonathan Porritt, Sustainability Campaigner and Author**

*In a world of interlocked crises, there is an urgent need to counteract hopelessness and wilful ignorance. This short book, written by two authorities in peace studies and well-experienced practitioners, offers an informed and persuasive account of key interconnected and current security threats. It stresses the importance of human security, and advocates for a less defensive and militaristic approach to protecting our future. The authors suggest actions at individual, community and societal levels which in time may help to divert us from the (in)security trap and inhumanity linked to exclusivist politics and economics profiting from it. The book also provides useful resources for information, mobilization and solidarity for those who may be inspired to know and do more.*
**Associate Professor Catalina Montoya, Director of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Liverpool Hope University**

*Few if any prophets have been so calm, steady and thoroughly vindicated as Paul Rogers. At the time he warned that if the USA invaded Iraq it would initiate a disastrous thirty year war that would spread out across the Middle East and suck America to defeat. And here we are, only two-thirds of the way through. Equally, he emphasised at the start of the century the twin dangers of climate change and hi-tech bellicosity. Free from florid rhetoric, incredibly patient and rooted in careful research, he needs to be read and listened to. Now in this lucid overview of the current 'polycrisis' he sets out what can be done before it is too late.*
**Anthony Barnett, co-founder and former editor of openDemocracy**

*Paul Rogers has long been a source of insight, inspiration and support to those of us reaching for a deeper analysis of global peace and security issues. This short book offers a remarkably concise and accessible overview of the interlinked environmental, economic and security challenges that shape our current trajectory, pointing us towards the work required to build a sustainable future for people and the planet.*
**Celia McKeon, Chief Executive, Two Ridings Community Foundation**

# The Insecurity Trap

## A Short Guide to Transformation

Hawthorn Press

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## A Short Guide to Transformation

### Paul Rogers

**With Judith Large**

Hawthorn Press

## Dedication

For Tyoma and James

# CONTENTS

# Setting the Scene

There will be readers of this book who are experiencing directly how 'global security' issues affect their daily lives: higher energy prices, the disruption of supply chains, daily exposure to images and reporting from conflict zones of suffering and war, fewer and more expensive food supplies, homelessness, air pollution, floods, or disruption from climate crisis. Others know first-hand the grief and loss incurred by war, the experience of dislocation or being a target of hate because of identity affiliation and nothing more. These are the intersecting experiences of insecurity. They can be numbing, or overwhelming. To respond or act effectively, we need an understanding of what is happening and how to navigate it. We need to know our part of the whole.

The work of Paul Rogers has been dedicated to providing such a big picture. The first edition of his *Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-First Century* was published just before the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in the US in 2001. In it he introduced the concept of 'liddism', a tendency for Western states to attempt to control threats to international security by military means, rather than by understanding their nature and the underlying factors and thus countering them at source. This approach has been compared to a pressure cooker where every attempt is made to keep the lid on, instead of turning down the heat. One of Rogers' early observations regarding global security was that well-off industrialised states were vulnerable to attack on their centres from small, disaffected non-state actors who could leverage pressure on vulnerable targets. Observing precedents in IRA (Irish Republican Army) attacks in UK urban areas, and the attempted 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center in New York, he reflected on possible US reactions in the event of a wholescale attack.

The opening of the twenty-first century came in the wake of the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union and a reconfiguration of the post-1945 world order. There was talk of the end of history, the triumph of democracy (or, some said, capitalism) and a new international system. But in that last decade of the twentieth century former Soviet states imploded with violent civil wars and re-emergent 'frozen conflicts' along ethnic and territorial lines (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria). In 1994, during a period of about a hundred days, some 500,000 to 800,000 people were killed in the Rwanda genocide. Bitter war raged during the dissolution and wars of Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995 and again in 1999 over Kosovo.

And yet UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 'Agenda for Peace' was a foundational statement of the UN's role in stabilising the post-Cold-War world.[1] It welcomed the end of Cold War 'distrust and hostility' between superpowers and detailed how the UN – assisted by a functioning Security Council – could operationalise work on preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding. This blueprint for a proactive, interventionist UN set the terms for policy discussions about the legitimacy of intervention for the ensuing three decades. It set the stage for new cooperation and the multilateral demonstration of a rules-based order.

For an international rules-based system (as enshrined in the founding of the United Nations) to be effective, the rules must be seen to be observed by their principal and most powerful advocates. It follows that the post-9/11 decision by the George W. Bush administration to invade Iraq in 2003 (under a contested UN authorisation) cast a long shadow over the US claim to be the champion and defender of a rules-based international system. The subsequent failure to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, the use of torture in US operations, and the continued use of presidential 'War on Terror' directives to carry out lethal drone strikes in

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1. See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*, New York, UN, 1992, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en

the Middle East and Pakistan (often with ensuing civilian deaths)[2] have left the United States open to accusations that it is selective about when it does and does not abide by the international norms and rules that it expects others to comply with. Some critics say this has opened space for other countries to pursue a 'might is right' approach in their own policies. International capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance or to convene conflict resolution processes has suffered, or even failed, as in Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine and Gaza. Moreover, Western emphasis on a rules-based order is coming to be seen as hypocritical and aimed only at preserving self-interest or Western domination.

The 2024 annual report from the Munich Security Conference observes that the world has entered a new era of decline in global cooperation, in favour of zero-sum thinking and advantage-seeking through protectionism, self-interest and rejection of multilateral cooperation.[3] It identifies a trend towards transactional thinking that favours short-term goals. This is in a time of need for the entire planet, when climate change has no respect for borders or national interest, and human beings are experiencing their interdependence every day.

Four editions of *Losing Control* have now addressed such issues. This summary volume exists in a context that has changed from the circumstances in which *Losing Control* was first published over two decades ago. Along with the decline of multilateralism and UN legitimacy, there are other factors to bear in mind when reading *The Insecurity Trap*:

1.  *Shifts in governance and response to democracy projects.* Electoral democracy is functioning, even flourishing. In 2024 more citizens than ever in history will cast their votes in at least 64 countries (as well as the European Union) –

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2. See proceedings of Chatham House / London Conference 2015, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/London%20Conference%202015%20-%20Background%20Papers.pdf
3. See 'Lose–Lose?', Munich Security Report 2024, https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2024/executive-summary/

representing about 49% of the people in the world – that are scheduled to hold national elections. But democracy is much more than just holding elections. For at the same time (and foreshadowed by Victor Orban's early declaration that Hungary was an 'illiberal democracy') the nature of leadership and governance has increasingly shifted to tighter, centralised, more autocratic rule and in many cases the rolling back of state provision of public services.

In a corresponding development we see what has been called 'the New Checks and Balances'[4] as citizens take initiatives and organise for reform, whether in relation to social responsibility and inclusion, climate, poverty reduction, or defence. Human rights organisations, civil society networks and non-governmental organisations, popular movements, advocacy campaigns and investigative journalists are all playing an irreplaceable role in promoting social justice and change.

2. *A rise in populism and nationalist movements.* India, long proud to be the world's largest democracy, is led by Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi; recent elections in the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden saw success for right-wing populist parties (Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party, the Brothers of Italy, Sweden Democrats). Between June 2016 and the end of 2017 there were major upheavals with the victory of Leave in Britain's European Union referendum, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, and unprecedented support for Marine Le Pen of the Front National in France. Jair Bolsonaro is now barred from running for office in Brazil but continues to command support in rallies and public mobilisation. Vladimir Putin's reinvention of nationalist history and subsequent military campaign has brought catastrophic war for Ukraine and untold suffering for the Russian people.

3. *Increased mistrust of institutions and science.* For many, the

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4. International IDEA and Global State of Democracy Initiative, 'The New Checks and Balances: Global State of Democracy Report 2023', https://www.idea.int/gsod/2023/

global COVID-19 pandemic altered the relationship between citizen and state as well as causing countless personal tragedies of loss, bereavement, and disruption of income generation and daily life. The scale of social vulnerability plus the availability of social media has contributed to a rise in the denial of science and in new conspiracy theories on both the origin of the virus and the intent of governance. Conspiracy theory extends to the denial of climate change and even Holocaust denial. Based on closed thinking and 'truth', it preys on the vulnerable by offering certainty and is difficult to dispute with rational argument, because (by definition) all opposing or alternative views are part of the conspiracy. Often a viable counter-narrative is the demonstration effect of robust civic groups and the creative options they bring.

4. *The rise and speed of electronic media able to influence and control.* Social media platforms have dramatically changed communication. They set social standards, enable relationship-building, express and negotiate values, deliver news. In the process, they have also become safe enclosed spaces for the spread of hate, conspiracy theories and disinformation. By design, algorithms feed and fuel views already held, ever reinforcing beliefs, interests, or opinion trajectories. Social media hold the power to educate and inspire creativity or to instigate and incite mob violence; to inform and entertain or to bully and attack. We face regulatory challenges on discernment between free speech and hate. Facebook formally apologised for its role in Sri Lanka's 2018 anti-Muslim riots after an investigation found that incendiary content may have led to the deadly violence.[5] On the other hand, climate activists and change agents working to campaign for tax reform, reduce poverty or support refugees are building communicative communities via social media.

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5. Tasnim Nazeer, 'Facebook's Apology for Its Role in Sri Lanka's Anti-Muslim Riots Should Spark Change', *The Diplomat*, 15 May 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/facebooks-apology-for-its-role-in-sri-lankas-anti-muslim-riots-should-spark-change/

As high-speed wireless internet becomes more available world-wide in public spaces, businesses, taxi drivers and market traders in Nairobi or Liverpool can take payment by mobile phone; Sri Lankan fishing communities receive advance tsunami alerts by phone; and photos taken via phones at scenes of violence may be circulated instantly, as for example with the death of George Floyd and in the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement. Thus, we have unprecedented sources of instant documentation for purposes of accountability and justice.

  All these circumstances give us entry points as individuals or in groups or communities to work counter to the insecurity trap of climate change, economic injustice and inequality, and militarism. Let the big picture presented by Paul Rogers in this book serve as a landscape to navigate. Let it empower us to act.

<div align="right">Judith Large</div>

# A Short Guide to Transformation

More than fifty years ago, the economic geographer Edwin Brooks warned of the risk of a 'crowded glowering planet of massive inequalities of wealth buttressed by stark force yet endlessly threated by desperate men in the global ghettoes'. His phrasing seemed thoroughly dystopian then but is all too believable now.[6]

In the past few years we have come through the COVID-19 pandemic that killed over twenty million people as well as increasing economic hardship and poverty, especially across the Global South. Two wars, in Ukraine and Gaza, have been added to existing conflicts in Myanmar and the Sahel region of Africa, a brutal civil war has engulfed Sudan, millions have been displaced in the long war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and there are increasing tensions over the status of Taiwan.

The conflicts are serious enough, but they are elements in a global pattern of insecurity made worse by two other trends. One is the marginalisation of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people across the world and not just in the Global South, and this leading to increased bitterness and anger as well as aiding the growth of extreme paramilitary movements. On top of this is the recognition, finally, that the world's climate is changing for the worst, and rapidly. The term 'existential threat' is frequently overused but global heating really is taking humanity in the direction of societal breakdown unless radical change comes, and quickly.

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6. Edwin Brooks, 'The Implications of Ecological Limits to Development in Terms of Expectations and Aspirations in Developed and Less Developed Countries', in *Human Ecology and World Development*, edited by Anthony Vann and Paul Rogers, London, Plenum Press, 1973.

A sense of unease is increasingly expressed in social parlance that 'things are falling apart'. Prices are rising but provision of goods and services is falling. Homelessness and food banks are both on the rise. Perhaps ironically, domestic measures introduced early in the twenty-first century for the War on Terror and later for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) did not contribute to a sense of security or cohesion, but instead added to suspicion and division among communities.

In short, it looks like a very troubled decade or more ahead, and many changes are urgently needed. This is where the 'insecurity trap' comes in. A bitterly divided world really is facing limits to growth, but this is in a pervasive culture that prioritises a security approach of hard militarism to provide Brooks's 'buttress' to protect the better off. Each challenge is seen as requiring a tough response to that challenge alone, and little thought is given to where the challenge is coming from.

If we are to respond to the underlying causes, three linked questions must be considered:

- Can we come to terms in time with the environmental limits to growth?
- Can we transform the world economy to ensure that there is far better sharing of what we have?
- Can we change our understanding and practice of international security to focus on a human security approach that works for all, not a minority elite?

Many other issues will affect our expectations and fears for the future, but these three questions are likely to be central to the world of the near future, especially the next decade. It is inevitable that people get thoroughly depressed by the state of the world, but there are powerful arguments in favour of a more positive future, especially if we recognise that we as individuals can make a difference when we work together.

The immediate task, and the reason for this short book, is to summarise current trends in the three fields of environment,

economy and security; analyse how they are connected in an overarching insecurity trap; and look ahead to the positive possibilities of change, including suggestions for responses as individuals and communities.

# Limits to Growth

## *Climate Breakdown*

The most pressing aspect of global limits to growth is climate breakdown. The main international process for facing up to that is a UN body that meets every year, the most recent session being the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework on Climate Change. That mouthful is helpfully abbreviated to 'COP 28'.

The COPs have had a chequered history, mainly through their repeated failure to deliver agreements to limit the main cause of climate change, carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. COP15 in Copenhagen back in 2009, for example, started with high hopes but finished as a damp squib with little achieved. COP21 in Paris in 2015 was more successful and set a series of clear targets. Since then, though, the achievements in subsequent COPs have not lived up to expectations, especially when measured against the accelerating changes in climate and the greatly enhanced knowledge about why they are happening. That doesn't mean that it is now too late, but it is essential to understand the reasons for the persistent lack of progress.

This is helped by putting the whole 'limits to growth' issue in a broad perspective, with an emphasis on a series of changes during the mid-1970s. This may seem an unnecessary detour, but it is not, since that decade set in motion trends that have helped determine why we are in such a mess now as well as providing a clue as to how to get out of it. A good place to start is even a bit

earlier, with the achievements of two remarkable women in the 1950s and 1960s, and two stand-out books published in 1962 and 1972, *Silent Spring* and *Limits to Growth*.[7]

In the early post-war years an experienced fisheries biologist in the United States, Rachel Carson, was a gifted science writer, responsible for two bestselling books in the 1950s on marine ecology, *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).[8] Her next project related to concern during the 1950s about the marked decline in bird populations, especially in farming areas that relied heavily on new types of organophosphorus pesticides. Direct links between the two were made through some nifty research by ecologists. Carson looked at this in detail and published her findings in *Silent Spring*.

This lifted the lid on the impact of the poisoning of birds as a marker of wider ecological effects. The agrochemical industry was bitterly opposed to the implications of Carson's writing. She was subject to persistent personal attacks, but was also supported by many scientists working in the field. Her book went on to have a huge transnational impact and was one of the key texts that contributed to growing awareness of the impact of human activity on the world's environments. Individual disasters such as the *Torrey Canyon* tanker wreck in 1967 contributed to this.[9] One of the worst was the terrible Aberfan tragedy of 1966 when a coal-mining waste heap collapsed and engulfed a school in the Welsh mining town of Aberfan, killing 144 people, including 116 children in the village school.[.10]

By the start of the 1970s, attention across much of the Global North was focusing on environmental problems, one

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7. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1962; Dennis Meadows, Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *Limits to Growth*, Switzerland, Club of Rome, 1972.
8. Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1951; Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1955.
9. Tim Harford, 'Lessons from the Wreck of the Torrey Canyon', *Financial Times*, 15 February 2019.
10. Meilan Solly, 'The True Story of the Aberfan Disaster', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 15 November 2019.