





## comment



**T**he geopolitical aspects of the global migration crisis currently appear to be overshadowing those of climate-related issues and human-caused technological disasters.

The world is possibly experiencing its worst refugee crisis ever: around 60 million people around the globe have fled their homes, displaced by conflict, violence or persecution. Predictably, the main – though by no means exclusive – cause of this exodus is conflict, whose attendant effects extend far beyond the communities directly involved.

Eighty-six per cent of the world's refugees are being sheltered by developing countries, says the UNHCR. Mass migration of this scale is an immensely difficult situation to manage with dignity and humanity in any circumstances. The situation in Europe in particular appears to be in danger of spawning far wider consequences, exposing fault lines in European unity and politics, possibly threatening the cohesion of its societies.

This is particularly true with regard to the controversial subject of integration, where public sympathy for refugees has suffered some erosion after incidents of sexual attacks and harassment (page 38).

Our article on page 40 looks at how the European Commission is co-ordinating requests for assistance from those countries at the frontline of the crisis, while possible solutions in terms of border control technology are outlined on page 42.

In case we needed any reminder of why so many people are making the dangerous journey to what they hope will be a safe haven, the article on page 44 reports on the staggering levels of UXO dropped onto civilian communities by airstrikes in Syria, while page 46 looks at the detrimental effect of conflict on urban services. And lest we forget the psychological impacts of war, its effects on mental health are examined in the article on page 32, while sexual violence in conflict is discussed on page 34.

So this is how the narrative of this edition of *CRJ* has been shaped – we can only present the briefest snapshot into how the trauma of conflict not only causes near-inconceivable suffering to those who are directly caught up in it, but also how its effects inevitably seep across borders into neighbouring countries and far beyond.

Emily Hough

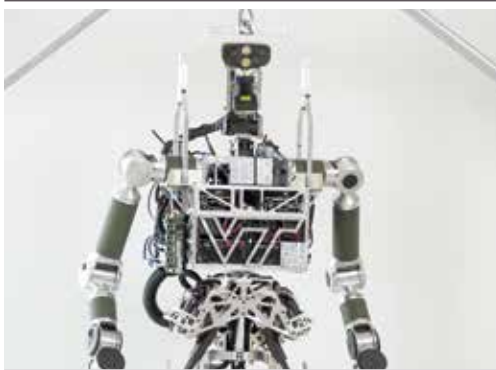
UEMULFVLUPGERLF .....	46	<b>The ripple effect of insider threat attacks .....</b>	72
GRPHPLQCLASHASOHDUHQHFWHGEDUPHGRCFLWLT		Ryan Meeks considers resilient critical national infrastructure in the age of connected systems within the Internet of Things	
<b>UNISDR science event</b>			
<b>The North Atlantic and weather extremes .....</b>	50	<b>Social media analysis tools .....</b>	78
Dr Aurélie Duchez and colleagues look at connecting the dots between climate change, extreme weather and health		It is important to integrate social media into emergency management practices, say Hayley Watson, Susan Anson and Kush Wadhwa. But don't be daunted, there are tools to help	
<b>The Aral Sea disaster .....</b>	53	<b>Spatial information sharing .....</b>	82
Dr Abror Gadaev and colleagues from Uzbekistan present possible sustainable solutions to the Aral Sea disaster		Ivan Baehr provides an overview of how spatial information for humanitarian response has developed, as well as the challenges in implementing this technology	
<b>Simulation aids training in Japan .....</b>	56	<b>Innovation in crisis .....</b>	86
Dr Sonoe Mashino describes Japanese university collaboration on a disaster nursing global leadership programme, and the technology it utilises		The EU-funded Driver project aims to valorise European innovation and science in crisis management by assessing and delivering solutions for crisis management	
<b>Medical response</b>		<b>Hover power .....</b>	88
<b>Europe's emergency medical corps .....</b>	58	Dr Dave Sloggett examines the ways that helicopters provide assistance to people in disaster stricken areas and the vital role that they perform	
The EU's Medical Corps will mobilise medical teams and equipment to emergencies, writes Monique Pariat		<b>In Depth</b>	
<b>Casualty management in counter-terror .....</b>	60	<b>Legal liability in nuclear accidents .....</b>	90
Emergency medical support specialists from France's counterterrorist tactical unit, RAID, look at lessons learnt		<b>Effective decision-making records .....</b>	92
<b>Technology</b>		<b>Regulars</b>	
<b>CRJ R&amp;D: First responder safety .....</b>	64	<b>Events .....</b>	94
Ian Portelli, Megan Mantaro and colleagues present		<b>Books .....</b>	96
SRMVEOHVROKWRMZYRQHUKWHEUIMVDOUWLFHM		<b>Looking back .....</b>	97
<b>Critical space infrastructure and security .....</b>	66	<b>Frontline .....</b>	98
Dr Liviu Mureşan and Alexandru Georgescu discuss the complex evolution of space systems and potential future vulnerabilities		Emily Hough speaks to Dr Martina C Fuchs of the Real Medicine Foundation	

### Services in urban conflict p46



ICRC

### R&D: First responder safety p64



US Navy | Virginia Tech



# A logbook for chaotic times

**Emily Hough** speaks to Patrick Lagadec about his new book, which charts the successes – and failures – of leadership in today's volatile and 'wicked' crises

**W**e've lost the initiative," said the colonel in charge of the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu after a series of catastrophic news from the frontline in the 2001 movie *Black Hawk Down*, directed by Ridley Scott.

This was supposed to be a surgically swift operation to capture a militia leader. The US forces had a total command of air, communication, equipment, skills and training. "But this perfect machinery was suddenly plunged into the unexpected, engulfed by city mobs surging from nowhere, leaders informed by a child and a basic chain of telephones," explains Dr Patrick Lagadec, former senior research scientist at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, France, and a Member of *CRJ's* Editorial Advisory Panel.

Lagadec says this incident is emblematic of the challenge facing crisis management in 2016. "On all fronts – environment, technology, public health, terrorism – we are struggling with off the scale, imbricated, systemic problems," he says.

"Such wicked problems confront us with the unknown, often revealing our ignorance that goes far beyond mere uncertainty. We are entering structurally volatile, pulverulent and chaotic worlds. Bedrocks, fabrics, visions, doctrines, plans and toolboxes all lose their robustness; global couplings and flash crystallisations can occur without warning."

## Inspirational dynamics

He contends that our current crisis management paradigm is not fit for such challenges: "Our rationality and all our tools are efficient for relatively limited, isolated, well-known incidents, in relatively stable and robust contexts. But today, our most basic references and visions don't work anymore."

Lagadec is emphatic that we must develop new approaches, switching from "plan and apply" to "question and invent". This is no longer just a matter of combining top-down processes with bottom-up dynamics, he explains: "A whole combination of collaborative and emerging dynamics has to be shaped and built. This is a new world."

But we are far from being ready to enter the process creatively, according to Lagadec, whether intellectually, psychologically or operationally. This is because disasters have become more difficult to understand and map, harder to process mentally and accept.

Lagadec explains that his aim when writing *The Continent of the Unexpected* was to offer an in-depth radiography of the difficulties, resistances and capabilities to meet the challenge. The book is a vivid account of a myriad of circumstances where people have been confronted with the unknown. "It helps the reader understand the difficulties one has to go through, the possibilities that can be opened; it describes inspirational dynamics that have stimulated operational invention," he says.

"I observed so many situations where it was impossible to ask

questions, or even count on leaders attending an exercise. But the voyage was marked by visionary people who were extremely committed to addressing the most impossible questions, stimulating the best engagement of their teams," Lagadec adds, before moving on to specific examples.

In Ottawa in 1989, at a Nato conference of high level officials discussing major risks, the General who gave Lagadec the floor whispered: "Please don't scare the audience." This was just before the Berlin Wall came down.

Another example was in Marseilles in June 2001, during a closed meeting for the Prefects of southern France. The subject was major risks, and Lagadec was addressing key officials. He had only spoken for a few minutes when a national defence official interrupted him in mid-sentence, saying: "Things are totally under control, I will not allow this presentation." During the cocktails after the event, the same official came up to him and said: "You were right, but one cannot let such things be said to Prefects." This was shortly before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Lagadec continues: "I have lost count of the times we had to cancel an exercise, a conference or a talk, just because it appeared too terrifying to the people in charge. Some seem to think we can talk about risks and crises as long as we don't raise questions, as long as we stick to a script with planned answers and PowerPoint presentations," he laments.

There are beacons of light amid this denial – the book underlines an enlightened group of visionaries who have demonstrated how to clear paths through the unknown. Mike Granatt, who founded the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the UK, is one example.

Lagadec cites Roy Williams, Director of Operations at New Orleans International Airport, who harnessed inventiveness during hurricane Katrina to save 30,000 people. "This was thanks to his strategic ability to draw lines when all the familiar topography has been turned on its head," he explains, "along with his ability to empower both his team and people beyond his team."

He also admires Admiral Thad Allen, appointed ten days after the Katrina "fiasco", who was able to answer the first challenge, which was determining the essence of the problem. Allen summarised this as being: "A weapon of mass destruction without a criminal dimension".

Lagadec says this is the way to transform the culture of crisis preparedness and response: "Not with PowerPoints and camera-ready sound bites; the challenge is to open our frameworks, visions, and paradigms, to clear the way to new, innovative capacities."

The final point of the book, according to Lagadec, is to: "Prepare leaders and people – especially in an age of social media – to jump into discovery and collaborative invention."



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*In an age where basic understanding, fields of reference and visions no longer apply to current crises, the answer lies in discovery and collaborative innovation, according to Patrick Lagadec*

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