

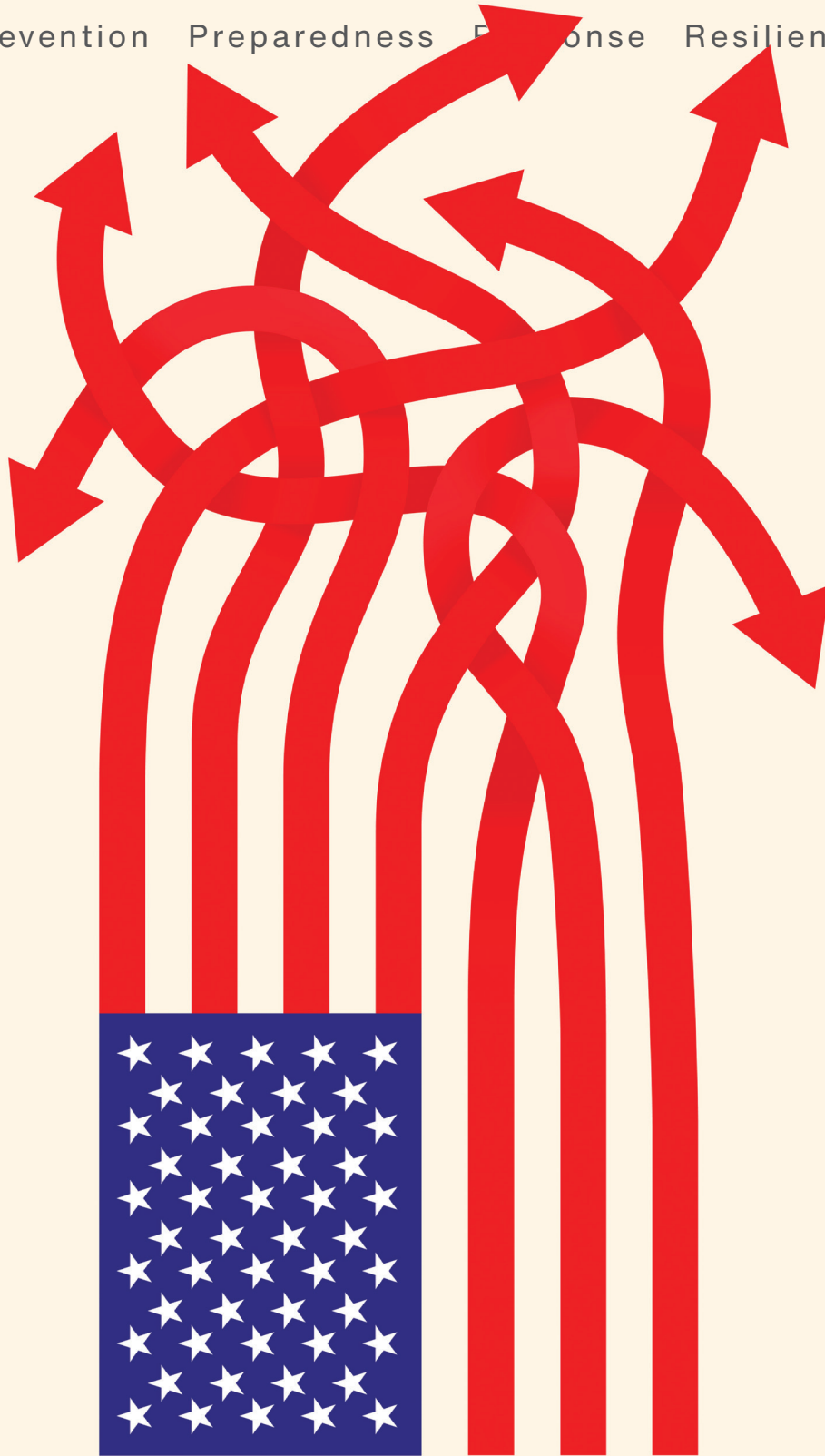
# CRISIS RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness  Response Resilience Recovery



## QUO VADIS USA?

PREDICTING CRISES & RESPONSES

Afghanistan | Pyroterrorism | Managing  
Burnout | Cybersecurity | Change &  
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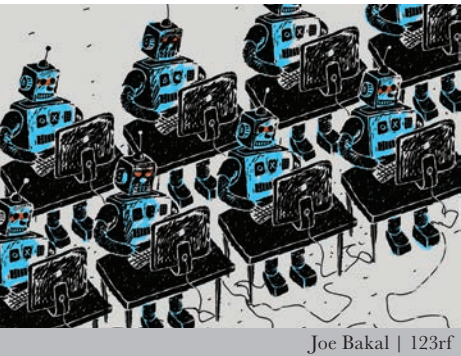
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contents

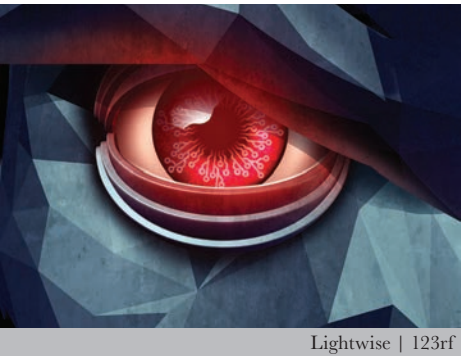
|  |    |
|--|----|
| News .....   | 4  |
| Comment  |    |
| Violence against healthcare in conflict .....  | 8  |
| Leonard Rubenstein discusses the drivers, logics and rationalisations of violence against healthcare                               |    |
| Afghanistan Analysis   |    |
| Crises within crises .....   | 12 |
| As the complexity of Afghanistan's issues increases, two fundamental elements are missing, says Luavut Zahid: trust and clarity    |    |
| Escape from Kabul .....  | 16 |
| Andrew Brown describes helping those most at risk to flee their homeland   |    |
| What next? .....   | 20 |
| Barbara Kelemen looks at investment and donor issues   |    |
| Security & Analysis  |    |
| Cyber-jihad in 2021 .....  | 22 |
| Olivier Cauberghs and Lisa De Smedt explore the digital transformation of the three biggest players on the cyber-jihad battlefield |    |
| The propaganda machine.....  | 26 |
| Ørjan Karlsson describes how the propaganda machine is being professionalised  |    |
| Sitting ducks: SMEs & cyberattacks .....   | 28 |
| Legal requirements, insurance, public relations and human resources are vital in cyber incident response, argues Larry Lafferty    |    |
| EMP attacks .....  | 30 |
| Lina Kolesnikova assesses the risks of electromagnetic pulse attacks   |    |
| Pyro-terrorism in forests .....  | 34 |
| Tony Moore says that the pyro-terrorism threat should not be ignored   |    |

Propaganda p26



Joe Bakal | 123rf

Artificial intelligence p42



Lightwise | 123rf

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Technology  |    |
| Drones in emergency response.....   | 37 |
| PIX4D describes a use case that proves how useful drones can be during a crisis   |    |
| Bridging the gap.....   | 38 |
| Adam Berry reports on how military processes for crisis management can be applied to a civilian environment, with technology's help |    |
| Artificial intelligence .....   | 42 |
| AI can be used for good, says Matt Minshall, but its exploitation by criminals or terrorists must be avoided                        |    |
| Leadership & Crisis   |    |
| A moral compass .....   | 45 |
| Beverley Griffiths calls for a code of ethics and conduct for emergency planning  |    |
| Facing up to future challenges .....  | 46 |
| We are failing to understand the threats and the scale of the shocks on the horizon, contend Patrick Lagadec and Laurent Alfonso    |    |
| Pushing your boundaries .....   | 48 |
| Lyndon Bird argues that, at its heart, business continuity is a simple idea and not a complex matter as many seem to think          |    |
| Crisis management needs facilitators.....   | 50 |
| Traditional tools and methods still dominate the crisis management sector, says Thomas Lahnthaler                                   |    |
| Building a crisis management system.....  | 52 |
| Raphael De Vittoris explores the creation of a multi-layered crisis management system   |    |
| People & Development  |    |
| Cross-sectoral resilience networking .....  | 56 |
| The Crisis Management Innovation Network Europe brings practitioners and policymakers together, says Jon Hall                       |    |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The Swiss Army knife of leadership .....  | 58 |
| Andy Blackwell & Nina Smith share their experiences of mentoring, recounting how it can contribute to the development of security and resilience leaders  |    |
| Staff endurance: A strategic resource .....   | 62 |
| Magdalena Lind details how to maintain the functional fitness of healthcare personnel   |    |
| Leaders in flames .....   | 66 |
| Burnout is not only about the front lines, says Eric McNulty. Here's how to be ready to lead when it matters most   |    |
| Leadership & Change   |    |
| Systemic change in complex times .....  | 68 |
| Gill Kernick vowed to do whatever it took to make sure that we learned from the events that took place in the UK's Grenfell Tower   |    |
| Living in an age of flux.....   | 70 |
| Emily Hough interviews April Rinne, who says that our relationship with risk must take into account how we consider and react to change   |    |
| How the mind works in a crisis.....   | 74 |
| Engagement with communities in the right way can create long-lasting, positive changes in mindsets, argues Stefan Flothmann   |    |
| Focus on the USA  |    |
| Predicting future crises .....  | 78 |
| Guest Editor Jennifer Hesterman introduces three experts from law enforcement, fire and rescue and emergency response, in order to take the pulse of crisis and emergency management in the USA |    |
| A first response health check.....  | 80 |
| Matthew Smallwood examines three emerging scenarios that will affect how emergency services will be able to serve their communities   |    |

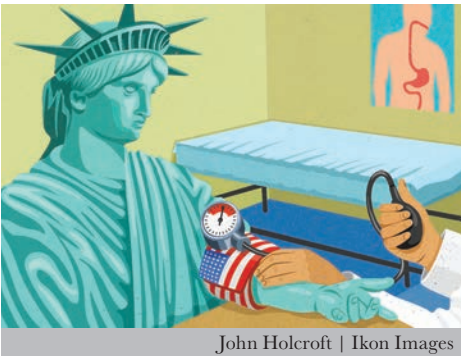
Mentoring p58



Adam Howling | Ikon Images

|   |    |
|---|----|
| What's next for policing? .....   | 82 |
| Lack of staffing, funding, the will to engage and citizen trust are some of the issues facing US police departments, according to Philip Galindo  |    |
| Climate change & cascading disasters.....   | 84 |
| Robert Witham says that the solutions to a catastrophic failure of critical infrastructure or the cascading effects of a weather emergency lie within communities themselves                              |    |
| Interconnections  |    |
| Universities building disaster resilience ...   | 86 |
| Nadine Sulkowski explains how governments and supranatural institutions can play a critical role in fostering policies concerning the cohesion and prosperity of society and environmental sustainability |    |
| Keystone cities: Irreplaceable hubs.....  | 88 |
| Constance Marzell-Kyme argues that understanding the complex interconnectedness of cities can be of immense value in crisis planning and response   |    |
| Questions to ask a donor in a crisis .....  | 92 |
| When a billionaire offers to help in the recovery from a crisis, what should your reaction be? Rob Shimmin investigates   |    |
| Plus  |    |
| Shaping future responses .....  | 95 |
| Why do we seem reluctant to learn lessons and, more importantly, apply them, particularly when responding to a crisis? Jeannie Barr explores  |    |
| Events.....   | 96 |
| Frontline.....  | 98 |
| Claire Sanders speaks to Lorraine Wapling about her mission to further disability inclusion in organisations around the world   |    |

USA feature p78



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comment

**A t the EENA 112**  
conference in Latvia this November, Patrick Lagadec took a satirical approach in his keynote presentation. The *CRJ* Advisory Panel Member discussed the Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the virus itself, drawing parallels with other crises. He analysed the virus's strategy in which its 'special forces unit' repeatedly expressed gleeful amazement at how humanity is facilitating Covid-19's deadly mission at every step.

Why do we so often make it easy for disasters to take hold and cause such tragic tolls? One reason, posits Gill Kernick on p68, is that: "Many of our top-down, bureaucratic and mechanistic ways of thinking, grounded in mythical cause and effect narratives... are becoming redundant."

Feedback in the session I moderated at the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction has also stuck with me. One participant noted: "We need to know our citizens better." Another highlighted the continued weakness in approaching disaster at a cross-sectoral level.

This is the very *raison d'être* of the *CRJ* – to encourage knowledge sharing and action between disciplines; the articles on p38 and 62 exemplify good practice in applying transfer of expertise.

And on p74, Stefan Flothmann discusses how to change the mindsets of disaster-afflicted communities to ensure better recovery and resilience. The psychosocial phases he discusses are equally evident in nations, businesses, emergency responders and individuals; in other words, across most of humanity. Today, many seem to be gripped by the 'disillusionment' phase, ground down by the painful, drawn-out pandemic crisis.

This theme continues in Jennifer Hesterman's guest-edited focus on the USA (p78), an unflinching snapshot of issues in fire and rescue services, police and emergency management. A recurring concern – among other issues – is the public loss of trust.

We must rectify this. Solutions are there, but political posturing, geopolitical jostling, opportunism, protectionism and empire building are endemic. If we don't change, we are all simply facilitators: collaborators with, and enablers of our common enemy – disaster.





# Facing up to future challenges

The world is going to have to think about different contexts for emergency intervention, contend **Patrick Lagadec** and **Laurent Alfonso**. The shocks on the horizon will be larger than and different from those we have previously experienced, but we are failing to understand these threats, and the scale and nature of the responses they will demand

“No one could have imagined this,” is the leitmotif long chanted after we have been tested by major incidents requiring an unthinkable civil protection response. The summer of 2021 has been marked by a succession of off-the-scale disasters. Transnational floods, heat domes and mega-fires have all taken place, set against the backdrop of a pandemic threat that has still not been brought under control, along with continuous cyberattacks, all under a cloud of the IPPC’s scathing warning of impending and immediate existential climate threats.

We could multiply the lists of situations to be expected, all of which are marked by unprecedented complexity and simultaneity. From a hurricane Katrina or Ida type event in Europe simultaneously affecting Paris, London, Brussels, Antwerp, etc, to an extended electricity blackout, coupled with many other rogue scenarios of gravity, space and duration, events are all lining up to strike societies and citizens who are already traumatised by cumulative mega-shocks such as storm Alex, Covid-19 and fire disasters in the Mediterranean.

However, under these circumstances, rather than drawing up lists, it is more relevant to identify the fundamental characteristics of the challenges ahead:

- Mega-shocks, breaking out of the agreed gravity and kinetic scales;
- The concomitance of multiple mega-disasters on an intercontinental scale in the Mediterranean basin and on Asian borders in Eastern Europe;
- The systemic disruptive power of each of these shocks;
- The vulnerability of resources that are essential to our current socioeconomic life: electricity, information, water and food. Any long-term failure of these vital

resources will trigger high-gravity paralysis; and

- The climatic upheaval, accelerator and catalyst of population movements from the South to the North. This could be owing to prolonged drought, which could plunge societies into exacerbated tensions, including in terms of food.

All of this is without forgetting the fragility of our societal bedrock, which is now marked by mistrust, dissociation, flight into untruth as the ultimate psychological protection, and populations becoming easily manipulated by shadow groups.

To cope, of course, we have well-established strengths and knowhow, as we have seen recently when it came to dealing with large Mediterranean fires, even if interoperability remains a weak point. There are local, regional, national emergency forces. There are also supporting forces, such as the Civil Security Instruction and Intervention Units in France and the network of 250,000 firefighters, and we have national air assets, the essential nature of which we

saw this summer in Italy, Greece and Algeria. So-called rescEU European capacities can also be mobilised to provide ground reinforcements, as in the responses to the earthquake in Haiti in August 2021; and in a more pessimistic outlook, in the fields of CBRN, transport and logistics, accommodation of emergency, medical evacuation or energy continuity.

This system has undergone significant changes in recent years, which allow for quite remarkable reactivity, power of action and co-ordination. France, for example, has implemented capacity pacts to ensure pooling of resources

between its zones. At the European level, we should note the progress that has been made, including the adoption, on May 26, 2021, of a new regulation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, with a multiannual financial framework that has increased fivefold, and an enhanced disaster prevention and preparedness programme.

But the picture of our risks and vulnerabilities demands much more. Given the scale of the crises to be considered, we will have to consolidate the resilience capacities of each country, especially in terms of air resources for wildland and natural space fires. Even further, we should set up rapid action forces, in a format to be defined, to have a supranational European strike force that is capable of responding in flash mode to the disasters we can expect.

We will need highly responsive and efficient co-ordination bodies, capable of holding very large-scale theatres of operations, and with high potential for destabilisation when vital networks are affected. In his 2006 report, *For a European civil protection force: EuropeAid*, Michel Barnier advocated, among his 12 recommendations, for the creation of a Civil Security Council.

And considering the depth of the shocks, we will have to think about anticipations and responses that will involve an increasing number of actors, companies,

non-governmental organisations, elected officials and citizens. Vital networks and the insurance sector will also have to rethink their fundamentals.

Given the difficulties of strategic management in an unknown situation, as will become more and more frequent, we will need decision-making bodies at a level of the heads of the European executives. The Emergency Response Co-ordination Centre (ERCC) must be able to transfer to a European decision-making centre within a defined operational mandate.

The level of complexity and the unknown threats to be faced demand common preparations – as yet to be widely invented – in order to think about and deal with these challenges that await us.

Finally, taking into account the overflowing scale of the situations, we will have to think of contexts for emergency intervention beyond the European framework. In this sense, the latest IPPC report (the *Sixth Assessment Report*) reminds us of the planetary dimension of interactions and the butterfly effects that will affect us collectively.

A central requirement marks all these avenues: urgency. Work on climate chaos has accustomed us, at least until recently, to warn about what would happen: “At the end of the century.” It is crucial to understand that the first big shocks are going to happen much sooner. Of course, we must concern ourselves with the end of the century as a matter of urgency, and we also have to worry about the end of the month, particularly as so many are facing economic difficulties at the moment. But it is about being able to accommodate the challenges and surprises at the end of the week.

Dismissing a crisis with the traditional ‘Nobody could have imagined this’, or ‘Nobody could have predicted it,’ will no longer hold water; such statements cannot be used as a get-out clause.

So as not to fall into the two current traps – nausea when faced with the accumulation of challenges, or delirium, the ultimate psychological protection for too many people – it is of crucial importance to put ourselves in a fighting posture.

Boldness, determination and speed are now the key requirements for survival.

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