
Introduction

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Biographical note: Dr Dag von Lubitz is a Chairman and a Chief Scientist at MedSMART, Inc., and an Adjunct Professor at the College of Health Sciences at Central Michigan University. He is the author of over 140 peer-reviewed biomedical research papers, holder of prestigious international awards, and a frequent key-note speaker on crisis and disaster management, medical technology and e-health, and on decision-making and leadership in the unpredictable and rapidly changing environments. He is working in the US and EU and serves as a consultant on network-centric operations in the context of homeland defence and security, implementation of simulation and virtual reality in worldwide distance education and training of 1st responders and medical personnel, and on development of advanced leadership skills at the executive personnel level.

OOTW, to which this special edition of the journal is devoted, stands for operations other than war. It is a modified version of its original MOOTW (pronounced, aptly and with the appropriate sense of the sardonic military humour, as 'mootwar') where 'M' stands for 'military.' In the days when the term and its corresponding acronym were created, the world of military operations underwent yet another of its dramatic profile changes. Gone were the plans for massive tank battles in the Fulda gap, naval strikes at the opposing task forces fighting to dominate transatlantic or transpacific sea lanes, and the all-pervasive fear of one of the sides originating the 'first strike,' whose aftermath could, potentially, lead to the devastation of the entire planet. The 'iron curtain' lifted, the 'wall' fell down and Germany reunited, and suddenly the armed forces of the former adversaries faced a completely new world. The world that was present all the time, but whose existence was hidden from view by issues either more threatening or, for the sake of political expedience, made to appear more threatening.

The 'new world' was and is filled with intense, local conflicts – many of which are extremely deadly, often extremely remote from the principal spheres of political interest of the prevailing powers-that-be, and yet conflicts with the extreme potential of causing untold damage to the rest of the world that struggles to transit into a less threatening future. The world in which, despite all hopes, racial, ethnic and religious conflict re-emerged with the surprising vigour and lethality, making once again the vision of unleashed weapons of mass destruction a plausible prospect made worse by the fact that this time there is going to be no warning of palpably increasing tension between the

major political blocks. There will therefore be neither room nor time for democracy in action, and no chance to solve the differences through the good offices of UN negotiations. This time, the release of horror may rest solely in the anonymous hands of a non-state actor, an organisation for whom execution of global terror provides the best means of attaining its murky political ends, and whose totalitarian credo eliminates reaching the negotiated accord as a matter of philosophical principle. In order to respond to these new forms of conflict that emerged in the post-cold war era, and in order to at least significantly diminish the new threats introduced by what is now known as 'the long war' the military had to change.

The traditional concept of war became moot – the blitzkrieg disappeared from the military horizon now substituted by ultra-mobile operations of small forces dispatched to the 'hot' regions, terminating the conflicts before they have the chance to spill over, and affect increasingly larger territories. Among the major new roles of the 'new military' is now to serve as the combination of the local police, fire brigade and ambulance service – arrest the lawless, quench the fires and restore public order and well being by liberally distributing generic aspirin of help, nation building and political stability. While the results may not always be completely satisfactory, the role of the armed forces irreversibly changed. Still, whenever they went, their training, extremely well developed concepts of logistical support, mobility, and their ability to conduct activities under extremely challenging conditions of geography, climate and operational fluidity combined with the command structure in a way that made the presence of NATO and UN military uniforms a welcome sight whenever the need for assistance was truly immediate, and the despair of those affected profound. Military became the instrument of peace, and war became 'moot' even if the operations of the armed forces remain just as intense, just as deadly and just as saturated with combat. Consequent to these changes, the concept of OOTW was born – operations that were not warlike in nature, but whose operational complexity, developmental fluidity and textural richness required the precision, coordination, and execution approaching those of which only the military was hitherto able to perform successfully.

Neither the evolution of OOTW nor the migration of the concept into the realm of civilian-maintained activities are surprising. The world of risk containment, conflict mitigation, disaster and disaster consequence management and humanitarian relief became the ever-present realities of life for the formerly almost neglected group of personnel – the first responders. New administrative units (e.g. the US Department of Homeland Security) were established, while the old agencies such as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expanded their roles, all vigorously embracing the new functions imposed upon them by the new realities of the new world. At times, the shift toward expanded roles and mission profiles combined with largely untested, new bureaucracies leading to calamitous results seen during and following Hurricane Katrina. At other times, the response was swift, well coordinated, and very effectively limiting potentially disastrous consequences of the original event (e.g. London bombings of 2005 or California Fires of 2008).

In tandem with the emergence of new approaches to homeland security and disaster management, the field of OOTW broadened. It has not matured yet, although the evolution (and, at times, revolution) increases its tempo, with the fuel amply provided by the friction of the new concepts rubbing against the old ones. New solutions to old problems begin to emerge, while old problems are now viewed in the context of new

realities. The wish to reflect these changes was the principal motive to compile this special issue.

The collection of the papers included in this special edition of the *Int. J. Risk Assessment and Management* is far either from addressing the entirety of the burning issues affecting OOTW or providing their immediate solutions. Nonetheless, the papers represent a broad insight into the extreme breadth of the involved challenges starting from the analysis of the new realities imposed by the emergence of global terrorism, through the nature of the increasingly prominent involvement of the armed forces in purely civilian operations and the political issues such involvement either poses or may pose, the problems of the involvement of technology and communications in the modern world of disaster operations, to the complexities of training the mainstay of all disaster recovery forces – the first responders. The theoretical foundations for such training are discussed in the paper devoted to comprehensive, multi-modal, distributed simulation approach as a tool in the development of operational readiness. Finally, a subject which, despite massive amount of anecdotal evidence, is probably addressed for the first time on the pages of a scientific journal – the role of rumour in the conduct of disaster management operations.

In summary then, we do not claim that this special issue offers a comprehensive cross section of either OOTW or the mitigation, containment or management of risks associated with such operations. However, the issue contains enough novel and provoking, maybe even controversial, thought to stimulate further debate, further analysis, and further development of the solutions to problems that affect us all as a civilised society. Problems that increasingly affect our present and future lives. We begin to realise that ours is a small planet indeed, and that only a concerted collaboration of nations – their governments, their military and legal arms, the national and international agencies, and, ultimately, of the individual scientists of all specialties, and even the citizens of the globe, will assure that the attainment of the ultimate goal of OOTW – saving human lives and helping people to recover from world wide variety of disasters – will become a tangible reality.

Acknowledgements

The Editor and all contributing authors would like to express their gratitude to Dr Nilmini Wickramasinghe, Associate Director at the Center for Management Medical Technology, Stuart Graduate School of Business in Chicago for her administrative assistance.