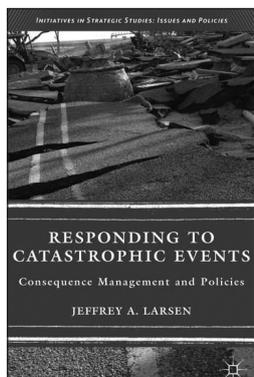


The advances in technology, the free flow of information coupled with the rise in extremism has made the world a more dangerous place than it used to be. Technologies like additive manufacturing make the possibility of nuclear proliferation greater than ever. The challenge of acquiring fissile material remains the greatest obstacle to overcome, yet the possibility exists that it will be achieved by a non-state actor. Indeed, what happens if the question moves from being “If?” to “When?”

In sum, *Right of Boom* represents a thoughtful but accessible treatment of a complex subject, particularly for one who is uninitiated in the subject. While the historical presentation it contains may seem at times to outweigh the specific idea of “right of boom”, it provides necessary context in support of the central theme. It is a particularly valuable reference for students of interagency operations. **IAJ**



Responding to Catastrophic Events: Consequence Management and Policies

Edited by Jeffrey A Larsen

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“Catastrophic events”, particularly as the term gets applied to weapons of mass destruction events, are, curious as it may seem, easy to dismiss as someone else’s problem in the big, lumbering federal bureaucracy. This is so because the events thus characterized are so overwhelming that they befuddle the imagination (and certainly would exhaust the resources) of any one agency that sought to deal with them. However, it is this fact which, more than any other, makes the response to catastrophic events the quintessential interagency challenge. The present anthology assembles the work of some of America’s most insightful public servants and clearly demonstrates that every organ of government at every level—tribal, local, state, and federal—is remiss if it fails to ask the question, “What is my role when the unthinkable happens?” and “With whom should I be talking as I imagine the unthinkable?”

Editor Jeffrey A. Larsen reminds us that when the unthinkable happens, it always happens somewhere: “All disasters are local.” Nevertheless, he also notes that “From the local perspective, federal resources often seem to arrive too late and leave too early.” While this is largely perceptual and part of that perception is unavoidable when people are suffering catastrophic loss, it is nevertheless the case that such perceptions, just like catastrophes themselves, must be managed if the public is to have and retain confidence in the proposition that, when all the local, familiar agencies have been overwhelmed, government will still be there to restore public order and function.

Part I examines the immediate aspects of a coordinated response: The first of these requires obtaining a proper degree of situational awareness, i.e., one that correctly scopes the problem, enables an effective, unstymied response, and discerns larger implications. However, as author James J. Wirtz notes, “larger implications” may arise in unexpected ways: anthrax in the food supply, the collapse of a major dam, or a chemical release in an urban setting. None of these

examples necessarily involve malicious activity by a foreign power, but the threats they pose are no less far reaching. The second aspect involves planning and acting within the actual constraints of time—this latter dimension constituting, in author Jerry Barnhill’s words, its own “tyranny” of sorts.

Part II provides a useful overview of the federal response, beginning with Richard Love’s dissection of the ideas of “homeland security” and “homeland defense” in which he explains the relationship of the Department of Defense to an interagency response effort. This overview is complemented by two pieces: one by Greg Moser and Garry Brieze that explains the balancing act required to ensure that the federal government assists local jurisdictions without overwhelming them, and another by Pat Allen Pentland that explains the particular features of the Department of Defense’s apparatus and method.

Part III undertakes two areas which, although easy for the operator to set aside as issues better left to specialists, are thus relegated at peril. G. Roderick Gillette explains, in accessible terms, the intricate and (to the lay person) sometimes mysterious legal considerations that inform all responses to catastrophic events. His exposition is an invitation to reflect upon the far-reaching consequences of legal decisions leaders at all levels are called upon to make under chaotic circumstances. George Haddow deals with another *sine qua non* of consequence management, namely, foolproof (or at least as foolproof as bureaucracies can make it) communications and public information protocol. Brian Lewis then compares domestic and foreign consequence management and effectively highlights the reality that what one assumes or takes or granted at home cannot necessarily be assumed or taken for granted abroad.

In Part IV, *Responding to Catastrophic Events* moves helpfully from the theoretical to the practical, with important contemporary case studies: the chemical attack on the Tokyo subway, by Erin R. Mahan; the response to Hurricane Katrina, by Jessica Iannotti; and the lessons that both of these events yield for WMD consequence management, by Shane Smith.

Finally, in Part V, Kerry M. Kartchner captures, in a concluding essay, the essence of the nexus between consequence management and national security—illustrating that the even if all disasters are local, anything that can be called a disaster inevitably has national security ramifications.

Responding to Catastrophic Events is a “must-read” for government leaders at all levels, regardless of whether their work-a-day activities involve the label “consequence management” or not. Its length, breadth, and accessibility make it a first choice as a graduate-level textbook in consequence management courses taught by federal agencies, in that it affords the thoughtful reader the opportunity to reflect upon such questions as:

- What is my role and that of my agency as part of a whole-of-government response to a catastrophe?
- What capabilities does my agency possess that will be essential in a response but which may not be obvious to those outside my agency?
- What information sharing needs to occur once a catastrophe occurs—and with whom? What information needs to be shared now, and what liaisons need to be established now?
- How can my agency best contribute to a successful encounter with the worst possible scenario when it is not (and may never be) in the lead?

The vexing (and, as a practical matter, probably insurmountable) challenge for texts of this kind is the dynamic nature of the bureaucratic structures, and to a lesser degree, the bureaucratic policies that they describe; and in no field of government action is that dynamism likely more operative than in the evolving world of response to catastrophic events. Terms like “crisis management” and “consequence management” may mean one thing to the lay person and quite another thing to the specialist—and both terms are now bureaucratically subsumed under the term “incident management”. However, it is difficult to imagine any team of authors being more successful at de-mystifying the relevant nuances than the present team of expert has been. Hence, it may be hoped that they will, in due course, prepare subsequent editions reflecting the relevant bureaucratic changes as they occur over time. **IAJ**