THE CHARACTER *of* HARMS:

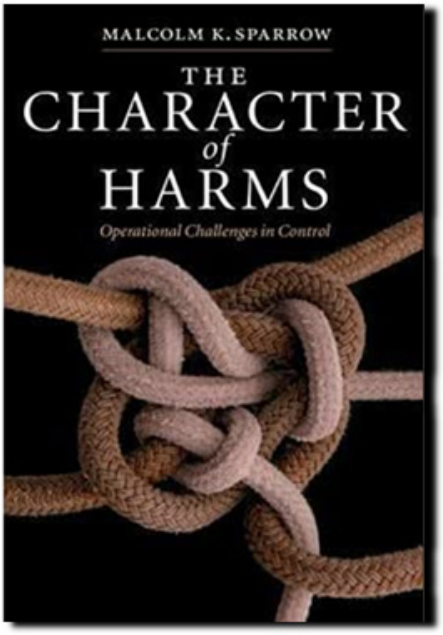
Operational Challenges in Control

Reviewed by Colonel Barrett K. Parker (Retired)

Professor Malcolm K. Sparrow's book entitled *The Character of Harms: Operational Challenges in Control* provides a framework and methodology with which to consider the protection discipline for multidisciplinary risk control programs in both the public and private sectors. The book, which has been republished every year since its inception in 2008, parallels Professor Sparrow's classes in the Harvard Kennedy School Senior Executive Fellows Program at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Sparrow explains that, despite the subject and technical diversity found in risk control constructs like the U.S. Army's protection warfighting function, all of the tasks share the same fundamental nature. Following are some of these fundamental similarities:

- Task implementation must be effectively balanced by "reducing the harms" (controlling the hazard) with proportionality, predictability, fairness, and consistency.
- Tasks must generate measures of performance, effectiveness, and/or customer satisfaction. This includes the goal of showing clear causality, the link between organizational actions, and a corresponding reduction in the likelihood or impact of harms.
- Task practitioners must grapple with integrating three different types of work: functional work, processed-based work, and work organized around specific concentrations of risk.
- Protection tasks are often peripheral tasks in an environment dominated by the organization's core mission.
- Practitioners must deal with situations in which improper or unlawful risk taking is performance-enhancing.
- Task practitioners must acknowledge that some risks are catastrophic in nature but that the risky events have seldom or never happened (extremely high impact, low probability), requiring combined prevention and response contingency planning.



Based on these commonalities, a better idea of what tasks should be grouped into protection programs designed to collectively reduce harms and how best to manage an aggregated program can be obtained.

Sparrow also counters two common arguments against having a consolidated protection type program. The first argument is that the effectiveness of hazards control depends only on domain-specific knowledge; in other words, only technicians or specialists can contribute to protection and each commodity area is quite unlike anything else. The second argument is that controlling harms is no different than "constructing goods"; for example, law enforcement measures can be reduced if ethics programs can be implemented or chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense efforts can be deemphasized if arms control treaties are strengthened or the number of enemy delivery systems

is reduced. (I have personally encountered both of these arguments since standing up the Protection Division, Fielded Force Integration Directorate, U.S. Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.)

Finally, Sparrow discusses the real value and benefits of an integrated, multidisciplined, harms reduction program like the Army protection warfighting function. These benefits include recognizing that some professions might have done a better job than others of learning the art and science of undoing harms and have developed more sophisticated tools and approaches within their domains. Lessons drawn from best practices within such professions can be applied more broadly. There is also value in recognizing that almost all vital operational decisions lie between low-level incident response (the realm of true specialists) and high, national-level policy decision making. Most protection programs and efforts can, therefore, be scoped between these two extremes.

This book covers many other topics that are helpful to the protection professional, regardless of branch or specialty, including a discussion about how some harms "have a brain behind them," while others are occupational or environmental hazards. The real value of *The Character of Harms*, however, is its focus on assisting protection practitioners in both the public and private sectors with successfully establishing or improving their overarching protection programs. The real-world vignettes and practical programmatic advice are what set this resource apart from the standard references of doctrinal Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*,[1] or conceptual U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC) Pamphlet (Pam), 71-20-7 *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection*.[2]

I highly recommend *The Character of Harms*. It is a straightforward and insightful book, which can be applied to Army protection warfighting function efforts at any echelon.

Endnotes:

[1]ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019.

[2]AFC Pam 71-20-7, *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection*, 7 April 2021.

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("EOD in LSCO," continued from page 35)

Terminology debates aside, the aim of the urgent revision is to establish a doctrinal foundation that defines and describes a spectrum of EOD capabilities, limitations, and risks associated with employing EOD units in support of maneuver and maneuver support units (the assault force) in nonpermissive environments. The intentionally broad definition of "assault force" potentially includes everything from a military police company conducting rear area security missions to a special operations force carrying out a raid on a high-value target. This broad spectrum of "assault forces," therefore, includes a wide array of maneuver support and protection forces to preserve and enable operations during LSCO.

Returning to the 50th Multirole Bridge Company example and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization definition of assault EOD—the embedded EOD teams maintained the momentum of an assaulting force in a nonpermissive environment. EOD teams reduced risk to friendly force operations through the positive identification of, and precision render-safe/unusable procedures taken against, adversary weapons systems and munitions. These precise actions ensured that abandoned weapons systems and munitions did not inadvertently delay or prevent the establishment of critical wet-gap crossing control measures or prevent the establishment of the crossing site through the accidental launching of rockets into friendly force staging areas, thereby destroying key terrain/facilities or releasing chemical agents. This exercise and pending EOD doctrine updates provide a great template for incorporating the lessons learned from counter-insurgency and counter-improvised explosive device operations and applying them to LSCO. It also provides a conceptualization for future doctrine updates, exercises, and experimentation at home station, combined training centers, and other venues.

The time is here to determine when, how, and why the spectrum of EOD capabilities is incorporated into maneuver and maneuver support operations in nonpermissive environments. Doing so will ensure that we capture the lessons learned from counter-insurgency and counter-improvised explosive devices while self-modernizing for the future battlefield. There won't be time to wait for EOD support in LSCO.

Endnotes:

[1]ATP 4-32, *Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Operations*, 30 September 2013.

[2]*Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Principles and Minimum Standards of Proficiency*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 7 February 2020.

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