The ‘operational incidents’ on which the contributors to this collection have focused are diverse. Without doing too much damage to their extensive range, we may summarize these types of incidents as those where there is a prima facie case that international laws or rules of engagement have been breached, or matériel has failed, or proper procedures have been circumvented such that either the lives of non-combatants or one’s own forces have been lost or put at serious risk, or the good order and functioning of a military unit is in jeopardy. The purpose of formal investigations in this realm is quite properly multi-faceted: to discover what happened and why, to assign responsibility (and recommend punishment, if appropriate\(^1\)), and to learn the lessons to avoid a repetition of such failures. Before we even reach this stage, it must be noted, there are issues of jurisdiction to confront, though in countries with robust legal traditions and respect for international legal norms and institutions these issues are less problematic than elsewhere. Once jurisdiction has been clarified, logic suggests, and recent history confirms, that there are two major complications to the smooth creation of a virtuous feedback loop. First, where there is much at stake, there is also the potential for (inter alia) dishonesty or ‘cover up’, so that investigations are blocked, or distorted, or secretive, or inconsequential. And the stakes are indeed often high, for operational incidents are more or less damaging to mili-

\(^1\) In the United Kingdom, the Board of Inquiry process was established in the Army Act 1955; Board of Inquiry investigations are about preventing a recurrence, but they are not permitted to make recommendations regarding disciplinary action; see John Cooper, *Inquests* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011), 157.
tary organizations, the officers that staff them, and the governments that deploy them. They may, for example, undermine the justice of undertaking a particular military campaign; they may identify serious deficiencies in preparation and training, operational procedures, or equipment (including procurement); they may end the careers of military officers; they may put at risk the budgets and very existence of particular operational units; and they may cause a government political or diplomatic harm, including bringing its legitimacy into question. Effectual investigations require honesty and courage from investigators at the very least. Though it may be more difficult in the international, than in the national, arena to initiate and pursue an investigation, the investigative teams assembled there tend to demonstrate these virtues to a very high degree. Second, the public availability of large amounts of information about particular incidents—whether from official sources, NGOs, investigative journalists, academics, or ‘whistleblowers’—means that investigations are increasingly played out in public.

What I have called the ‘Wiki Age’—where the technological ability to share information, including classified information, is massively enhanced—poses a challenge to governments’ routine and often unnecessary secretiveness; and it tests the credibility of government recourse to the rubric of ‘national security’, a term whose currency has been debased by cynical abuse. Yet despite a flood of information, the court of public opinion is not always well informed either about particular incidents or about the issues in dispute; vivid photographic and video images that have accompanied some of the operational incidents examined in this book, for example, supply urgency to the conduct of investigations, ensuring that they are difficult to sideline, but may obstruct the dispassionate analysis required of them. And in the public sphere genuine information vies with innocently- or maliciously-inspired misinformation. This chapter explores how these two major complications—one that prioritizes secrecy and control of information, the other that prioritizes its free flow—have impacted on investigations into operational incidents, and identifies the benefits and risks of the publicity that operational investigations will increasingly confront in the ‘Wiki Age’.

Let me first be clear about the limits of my brief. I make no judgments here about the justice of particular military campaigns, or the strategic approach to them, or the leadership within them (including whether such leaders have been given the appropriate resources to prosecute the campaign). These are all legitimate and important issues, and they help explain the motivations of ‘whistleblowers’ and the passion that opera-