

Dan Kaszeta looks at the turbid stew that is the preparation for London's 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

From fish soup to an aquarium... and back again

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have reached an expected watershed. We are witnessing a truly British phenomenon: a bout of panic after years of bureaucracy and muddle, and it is hard to resist saying "I knew this was going to happen." Whilst I am certainly not privy to what is going on behind the closed doors of the Olympic Delivery Authority, there are some valuable observations that I can make on their CBRN planning.

CBRN planning at major events always faces the risk of getting lost in the noise, and at an event as large as a summer Olympics it faces any number of obstacles. At a strategic level, security and safety have to fight for resources and attention alongside other valid objectives. At the next level down, within the domain of safety and security, CBRN has to struggle to keep a place on the planning agenda. I've been grappling with the issues of CBRNE planning and response at major events for some time, and as such I am in a unique position to delve into the issue of CBRNE preparedness for the 2012 Olympics.

An apocryphal Russian proverb tells us that it is easy to turn an aquarium into fish soup, but hard to turn the fish soup back into an aquarium. One might apply this maxim to the current Olympic situation and so, with that in mind, here are my observations about where we are today and where we should be.

Where do we stand right now?

It is very interesting to note that, for some years now, the prevailing ethos for many involved in the Olympic security effort has been characterised by a tendency to 'not do anything special' and to 'carry on as always'. 'Business as usual' has been the catchphrase in use for several years during the planning effort. After all, Superintendent Alan King of the Metropolitan Police told us as much in the pages of this magazine in 2009 (*CBRNe World*, Spring 2009, p. 39.) But is that mantra really the operating

procedure we want to enter into the Olympics with? Surely an Olympic games in a city that has historically had troubles with both Irish republican and Islamist terrorism requires something above business as usual.

Lost capability in the police and military sectors

The planning process for the Olympic security effort has been underway for years, but so has an austerity campaign. The UK is operating under a different financial climate now than when the planning effort began, and one wonders how many aspects of that effort have been reduced or eliminated due to the current desire for fiscal rectitude.

In the earlier days of Olympic planning, some interesting projects were in the development pipeline. The 'Scene Assessment Vehicle' was one such project. Chief Superintendent Andrew Sigsworth, of the Police National CBRN Centre, told *CBRNe World* (Autumn 2008, p. 40) that the project would "be embedded in good time for 2012". Readers will be familiar with the fate of the Scene Assessment Vehicle program: cancellation for budgetary reasons. Those of you who read the leader in the Spring 2010 issue will recall the editorial team's astute note that this cancellation left in its wake a capability gap the "size of Vimy Ridge."

Military capability in the CBRN field is in a similar state of flux in Britain. CBRN in the British military has seen some drama as part of the ongoing general restructuring of the armed forces by way of the Strategic Defence and Security Review and 'Planning Round 11'. From 1999 to 2011, the primary specialist CBRN capability resided with the Joint CBRN Regiment, composed of four squadrons from the Royal Tank Regiment and one squadron from the RAF Regiment. In August 2011, it was announced that the UK's Joint CBRN Regiment would be replaced by a Defence CBRN Wing in the RAF regiment. Why? You guessed it... funding problems. The

net effect of this move was to make specialised CBRN support an RAF-only effort. Even if the new RAF Wing develops equivalent capabilities, as promised, we all know that these transition efforts take a long time, and there is no guarantee that the new RAF capability will be a true equivalent to the capability once provided by its predecessor. Is the timing of this realignment helpful to any military efforts to support the Olympics? The answer is probably not.

Conventional security efforts

It seems that somebody, somewhere, seriously miscalculated how many personnel would be needed for venue security at the Olympics. The original estimate was 10,000 security staff and then suddenly a figure of 23,700 was floated by the UK government and reported throughout the media. Filling the 13,700-person deficit will take some doing. What is important to realise here is that CBRN preparedness rests firmly on a bed of conventional security. Prevention, deterrence and vigilance are all-hazards tools. Shortcomings in conventional security only serve to make it easier for terrorists to perpetrate evil deeds, CBRN or not. The 13,700-person gap should compel us to question whether other fundamental assumptions and estimates in the planning are incorrect.

It is also important to consider the effects of conventional security screening efforts. Screening measures that are too stringent or under-resourced will create queues, which will only exacerbate the large queues already created by various transportation and infrastructure chokepoints. For most terrorists, I think a large group of people milling about near a secured site is just as good a target as one inside it. Having a 'ring of steel' around the Olympic village and other major venues only serves to push terrorist target selection and reconnaissance onto softer targets, such as London's hundreds of hotels, the array of national Olympic houses or the vast

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public transport network. Venue security, whether it is conventional or specialised, can only get us so far in protecting against acts of terrorism.

Reconstructing the aquarium

So, where does this leave us? What should a proper preparedness and response effort look like?

Fix the conventional security problem

Conventional security measures need to be addressed adequately and early. Training, licensing, and recruitment need to occur early enough to avoid last-minute problems. If needed, draft in reservists from the Territorial Army to ensure adequate availability of staff.

London keeps moving

Keeping Londoners and visitors moving is a valid anti-terrorism objective. The great fear that most of us have in London is that the Olympics will cause weeks of gridlock for the whole city. Large assemblies of people milling about provide excellent targets for terrorists, this is true regardless of whether the situation is created by queues for security screening or by overwhelmed transportation infrastructure.

Make good capabilities better

There are good capabilities in UK and in London in particular. The London 2012 Olympics present an opportunity to put resources into the Met's already good CBRN capability, including its Dedicated CBRN Unit. Numerous Met personnel are trained to one of four levels of CBRN proficiency. However, the climate of financial austerity is likely to have adversely affected police capacity. Training and equipping police as CBRN responders is not cheap. Whilst it is not immediately apparent that capability has decreased, it almost certainly has not increased. It is time to give up on this business as usual approach. A large incident will overwhelm the existing capacity, so let's train more police officers.

The same applies to HART. HART represents valuable capability to actually rescue victims and perform emergency care in the hot zone, rather than waiting for victims to wander out, or an entry team to drag bodies out of the incident site. Helping the people who need help

but can't get to it is one of the great capability gaps in incident response. HART is one of the more useful and interesting attempts to bridge this gap. It should be strengthened and encouraged.

Let's not destroy capability, at least not until after the games

Even if the government is hell-bent on getting rid of the Joint CBRN Regiment, let's push this back 10-12 months and let the army leave the specialised CBRN business on a high note rather than a whimper in the bleak midwinter. In fact, let's put a lot more RAF guys into the effort as part of the transition to an RAF wing, rather than leaving a sparse army cadre to effect a poor transition. Indeed, this may even give the MoD time to reconsider whether the British army should be one of the only Nato armies without CBRN troops. This is not the time to send more than 300 CBRN-trained soldiers back to general duties.

Scrap the metal: trade in Gold, Silver and Bronze for ICS

Followers of CBRN response in the UK will be familiar with the gold-silver-bronze command structure, but it does not have widespread usage beyond Britain. My concern is that gold-silver-bronze is simply not as robust and as flexible as the more commonplace incident command system (ICS) model, particularly for CBRN and HAZMAT response. Gold-silver-bronze was invented by the police services in the 1980s for police incidents, and its implementation, even in police-only incidents, has resulted in mixed opinions on its effectiveness. I would direct readers to various publicly available after-action analyses of the 7/7 bombings, the Carlos Menezes shooting, and the Buncefield fire (all in 2005) to see some interesting commentary on the gold-silver-bronze system. It is not that gold-silver-bronze is a failure, but the question is whether or not the UK can do better.

The NHS mess

Finding more surge capacity in London's medical structure is a difficult nut to crack. Getting more field capability on to the streets and into venues is conceptually easy, if expensive. Ambulances and paramedics can be

drafted in from across the country. There is ample scope for tapping into various volunteer organisations and military medical units, both active duty and reserve. Has anyone thought of getting the volunteers up to speed on CBRN? Generating extra capacity for hospital-level care is the difficult bottleneck. Greater London does not have the comparative luxury of veterans' hospitals and nearby military medical facilities that are available to emergency planners in major American cities. The UK military has very limited domestic hospital capability, and none in London.

Assessment teams

My final suggestion is to train and field a number of small, multidisciplinary assessment teams. [Didn't the UK use to have MAIATs? Until they were scrapped because the children didn't play well together? Ed.] Major events provide an ideal climate for hundreds of intermediate scenarios, incidents that might have some CBRN aspect to them. With scarce and expensive response assets, you do not necessarily want them to get bogged down in situations where they are not really needed. Does the nation's full CBRN capacity roll out to a powder incident in Wimbledon while the opening ceremony is underway miles away? The US practice at major events is to use small Joint Hazard Assessment Teams (JHATs) to allow the incident command structure to assess intermediate scenarios. I would suggest that a fire service hazmat specialist, a military CBRN specialist, a police officer (possibly one of many counterterrorism detectives already CBRN trained) and a medic, all working together, would make a good London JHAT.

Conclusion

I'm not sure whether there is much that can be done at this late date, except argue over seasonings for the proverbial fish soup. But we can look at how the soup was cooked and see if we can avoid making the same mistakes again. After all, London will always be with us and will always be a target, with or without the Olympics. The problems outlined above will be with us long after the last medal is handed out. London needs to either be lucky or build a new aquarium.