

Open for excellence

CBRNe World attended the official opening of Nato's Centre of Excellence for CBRN Defence

Following the Prague Commitments in 2002, which saw a need for a rapidly deployable CBRN defence (among others) capability, it became apparent that there was a need for centres which could improve the training, education, interoperability and capability, develop doctrine and assess new concepts. As such, 16 Centres of Excellence were established, funded either nationally or multi-nationally, to fill these needs. Ranging from Cyber Defense (Estonia) to Humint (Romania), and more pertinently including CBRN (Czech Republic), EOD (Slovakia), Defence against Terrorism (Turkey) and Military Engineering (Germany), they are all at various stages of maturity. Despite having hosted a Sampling and Identification of Biological Agents (Siba) course in May, 22 November saw the official opening of the JCBRN Defence COE.

Best of the best

The COEs generally have a bit of manoeuvring before they fit snugly into the NATO structure. While the primary customer is HQ Supreme Allied Command Transformation (HQ SACT), the original mandate makes life slightly more complicated. For example, the COE needs to be multinational, needing more than two member states to participate and requiring the Centre should not duplicate the assets or compete with capabilities that already exist within the Nato command structure. This caused some confusion with the former Czech COE, which was

to provide CBRN training for NATO nations; after it became apparent this was not what HQ SACT wanted, the centre had to refocus on concept and doctrine development and this is the core task today. The JCBRN Defence COE should provide courses which are not on any NATO member's training curriculum. It is not just the JCBRN Defence COE that has suffered these growing pains; Slovakia is to provide the EOD COE, yet this can clash with the Military Engineering COE, meaning there will inevitably be a bit of jockeying before the division in the two organisations become clear.

What this effectively means for the centre is that the training it can offer has to be specialised enough for it not to occur on any of the established NATO Academic Institutions. Thus May saw the Siba course, and the week following the opening was the CBRN Joint Assessment Team (JAT) workshop. The Centre is in a newly refurbished part of the VYSKOV garrison and is staffed by a range of nations, including Czechs, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Romanians, and Slovaks. Colonel Radomir Mikes, Director of the Centre, sketched out the future. "In terms of the end-state, my idea is to have ten courses running in one year – to organise more courses will be beyond our capability," he said. "I have 17 personnel in the Education and Training Department, and their task will be to co-ordinate the courses by using the collaborative environment and external lecturers. I don't have any scientist here; that is a challenge, so all the courses are lectured by external

teachers, but on the other hand my staff can teach the typical military business – the decision-making process and so on."

The external lecturers are another challenge that all the COEs will face; the courses are ultra specialised, and staff educated enough to teach them scarce. The COE doesn't have the ability to commandeer the individuals; instead, it has to request them. "Getting the right person is the most difficult part," continued Colonel Mikes. "It is also a challenge for the NATO school in Oberammergau, and they have an established database of external lecturers, so one of our first challenges is the building up of people with know-how."

Yet this does mean the Centre can extend further than what are traditionally seen as the Czech Republic's strengths: chemical and radiological. Colonel Mikes explained that they would be able to outreach to other centres and work with their strengths. "We are discussing with the Defence Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA's) Defence Threat Reduction University (DTRU) in Albuquerque about the possibility of co-operating with them".

Multinational courses

The courses themselves will be difficult to pin down. The multinational nature of the Centre means it is impossible to look at a couple of nations, see a capability gap and devise a course for them. Equally, the COE cannot provide courses for countries that turn up at the front door with a requirement – though



Despite running courses since May, November was the official opening of the COE ©CBRNe World

that is still possible at Vyskov generally. "It is difficult," said Colonel Mikes. "I am not supposed to offer courses to a particular country. If you look at the memoranda, national training at the COE is possible but it won't be funded by the multinational budget and all the expenses for the training must be covered by the state. It is possible, and within the capability of the Centre, to organise some courses for NATO, but not for specific countries – not withstanding the participants might mainly come from one country. But it can't be designed for that country."

"The COEs generally are encouraged, to spot the capability gaps – despite the fact that the Centres are doing everything according to the directives designed by the ACT. In terms of course proposal and justification, key curricular development, etc, the first step is missing – the proper analysis of training and education needs. In the case of particular countries, they can justify the necessity to build up some course. Within NATO this process is more complicated therefore I have requested that the Commanders of multinational Corps provide us with their training needs. It is not good having my guys develop such and such a course, which could take up to one year, and then find out it is worthless for NATO transformation process," continued Colonel Mikes.

Part of the challenge with not devising a course for a set country is the fact that recipients might be at very different knowledge levels – both academic and operational. Czech CBRN officers, for example, go through a CBRN undergraduate – and possibly post-graduate – study which prepares them for the job in an entirely different way. This means you offer courses that are either so specialized, that it is only of interest to a select handful, or you devise courses that might well clash with national schools (and therefore set up a conflict with the mandate). Colonel Mikes agreed it was an issue. "It was shown during the SIBA course that we organised," he said. "It was developed especially from the viewpoint of how to take bio samples according to AEP directives, but there was a different level of proficiency in the participants. There

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wouldn't be a broad pool of experts in NATO who could do this, so when we did the SIBA course it was only for the people who were working with the management of bio samples, but others attended because they had heard about it but had no specific knowledge. In the future it would be better to try and diversify the courses offered; not to organise a course that lasts three months, for example, but to do more short term, one week courses."

In terms of delivering a lower level of CBRN training, Colonel Mikes suggested the way to do it might be to deploy out to the region in question. "I cannot guarantee the proficiency of any country or the people they send, but in our mission statement there is improved interoperability, and within the COE we have our mobile education and training teams," he said. "The difference between the COE and the NATO School is that while the COE is multinational and open to NATO, the Nato school is part of the NATO Command structure. So if people coming from Partner countries want to go to Oberammergau, then all the expenses regarding the stay would have to be approved by the NATO budget This will only apply to our NATO accredited

courses. When authorized by the steering committee, we can organise a course in any Partner country using the mobile team where four-to-five people could offer a basic course to improve interoperability and introduce them to the standard directives."

Catering for all comers

Another challenge for the Centre is that it can't be product specific, in the way that other schools can be; because of the multinational aspect of the school the equipment of the participants is likely to be diverse. Yet equipment and training always tend to go hand in hand; procedures and doctrine both feed off, and are fed by, the capability inherent in the equipment. So how, for example, does the COE deal with detection issues, since a large proportion of the training is product specific? Colonel Mikes explained. "I am able to set up some tasks that can be tried using their detector, and if they can find the agent in the soil or concrete, etc, then I can assess at the end of the training in an after-action review (AAR) whether the CWA was found using the specific detector and whether he fulfilled the task or not."

As you might expect for a centre

that has been open for all of two weeks at time of print, there are some teething problems to be worked out. The good (or bad, depending on your perspective) thing about this is that these are not problems inherent in the COE, but rather with the Centre's connection with the outside world. There is bound to be a bit of "feeling the way ahead" to ensure the COE remains relevant while not antagonising either NATO Academic Institutions or the national CBRN/NBC schools. A lot of this will depend on the personalities at the Institutions – they need to see the COE as a resource to be partnered with, rather than as a strategic competitor; after all, foreign students are a source of income for many of these schools. The Steering Committee will have to be the first line of defence against entrenched national interests (some of which might be their national interests) and strive to ensure the Centre is not hamstrung. Equally, NATO and ACT will have to help all the COEs find their feet but also ensure that the Centres prove their worth. As Colonel Mikes puts it: "We are still under development and are still feeling for our proper activity. As policy in Nato changes, we need to adapt to take advantage of those changes."



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