

Colonel Janos Zelenak, Commanding Officer of the Hungarian Area Control Centre, tells CBRNe World about how they are keen to keep building their multi-national capability

# Hungry for growth

**CW: What is the current capability of the military in CBRNE operations? How much is given to warfighting support – the need to get troops back into battle, conventional NBC activities – and how much capability is driven to “fourth stage conflict”/ counter-terrorism operations?**

JZ: Hungarian defence forces have two major CBRN defence troops. One is the 93rd CBRN Defence Battalion, and the second is ACC Hungary – Area Control Centre Hungary, my unit. Battalion capability is mostly decontamination and recce, a company-sized decon unit and two CBRN defence support Companies, which support Infantry brigade operations. The support company has recce, decon and Colpro capability. The ACC, which is responsible for organising and running the warning and reporting (W&R) of Hungarian forces, has three warning and reporting teams, area laboratories, which have sampling teams, chemical and radiological mobile labs, and one laboratory recon team. The nuclear early-warning system of the Hungarian defence force is also looked after by ACC: so we have an NBC desk officer team – basically a small team which is responsible for the Nuclear Early Warning system maintenance.

**CW: Are these units being used in conventional NBC missions – that is, warfighting support – or is their capability and mission set aimed at fourth-generation scenarios?**

JZ: These are for supporting infantry operations; we have no specific teams for counter-terrorism organisations. All the CBRN teams carry out CBRN defence tasks – recce, decon, Colpro etc – in case of a classic wartime task, but also in case of civilian support of a nuclear disaster, for example. We have not developed specific CBRN troops for disaster management, but the Area lab has a task in case of nuclear disaster. All CBRN troops have classic wartime tasks, and peacetime tasks, which are similar but involved with supporting the civilian authorities in case of threat. The Hungarian Air Force also has its own CBRN troops, the main airfields have a company-sized CBRN defence capability, which covers light recon, decon and fire protection/fire-fighting. The helicopter base has a special capability which is the aerial radiological recce; that is a task given to the helicopter troops and that is an organic capability of the Hungarian Air Force.

Area recce is the traditional radiological recce of the Hungarian CBRN troops; in the past we had a small radiological detector attached to the helicopter with operators reading the measurement, reported via radio. It worked but it was a Cold- War solution. We have developed a new one, which is independent of the helicopter: a small container is attached to the helicopter, with more sensitive detectors, meaning it can measure low level rad – used in nuclear disasters or normal rad surveillance – up to war-time level. We have just finished the second development of the container, the main task force will develop an air-ground radio link. We have two helicopters for the task continuously on stand-by, because it is part of the civilian nuclear capability

**CW: You have a close relationship between military and civilian forces, but how do you divide the tasks? Do you bring war-fighting detectors – chemical war-fighting agents (CWA) rather than toxic industrial chemical (TICs) – and test for those, while civilian forces test for their Hazmat range? Do you have a TICs capability that you provide to Nato, for example?**



*Hungary is keen on improving all of its capability, including decon, to offer it to multinational operations ©Hungarian MoD*



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*Hungary has one of the few airborne radiological recce capabilities in Nato ©Hungarian MoD*

**JZ:** We've not developed any capability for homeland security. The capability of the CBRN specialist troop covers TIC detection, they can detect it using simple chemical kits which will pick up most of the important toxic chemicals. The radiological equipment can measure low level, down to background level, so there is a capability we've used in NRF (Nato Response Force), for example. In terms of airborne radiological recce the sensitivity is such that during the test phase we use small shielded rad source – a few mega-becquerel gamma source – and the equipment and procedure are good for detection of small radioactivity on the ground from the air.

**CW:** One of the challenges facing CBRN troops is the convergence of CBRN and EOD operations. Is this something that Hungarian forces are looking at too?

**JZ:** Yes. We think that one of the major challenges is the CBRN terrorist threat and one of our important steps is improving the CBRN EOD capability; and that is the reason we are taking part in the EU CBRN EOD project. We are also planning to improve our EOD capability by installing chemical and radiological detectors on our EOD robot. They have a small robot used for detection of explosives and it can carry chemical and radiological detectors in case

of chem or rad threat. Bio detection is not so easy at the moment but we are working on it. But we are in the first stage of development.

**CW:** What are your priorities for CBRN? Are you looking to grow existing capability, such as more mobile labs, or to build new capabilities?

**JZ:** Our main priority is those troops that are used in Nato operations – especially the Support Company. Here the focus is on detectors, warning and reporting, decontamination and protection. We are looking to improve our DIM (Detection, Identification and Monitoring) capability, especially in hand-held detectors, but also building on the work that we have already done in warning and reporting and also nuclear detection. Out of CBRN we are going to make C and R identification a priority though we are also showing a growing interest in acquiring hand-held biological detectors – but this is just as the planning stage.

**CW:** Many Central and Eastern European countries benefited from an ex-Soviet investment in CBRN defence. Was this the case in Hungary, did you have a regional speciality, and how have you taken it forward – or was it a case of a blank sheet of paper?

**JZ:** Traditionally the Hungarian CBRN defence was provided by Hungarian defence equipment – the recce vehicles, decon, the DIM kit, everything that was used by our own forces. We also worked closely with the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles and we are trying to reintroduce this cooperation, not only in training but also in R&D. This has resulted in us having a greater understanding of our close neighbours but also providing us with a similar base knowledge. There is no strategic plan for this. It is mostly on a case-by-case basis, for example the radiological recce vehicle was a joint Czech-Hungarian effort, even though theirs is slightly different from ours. As another example, Slovakia has a stand-off chemical agent detector and we are looking at cooperating with them in terms of marketing.

**CW:** Is the aim of this cooperation a desire to create a regional bloc – like the Nordic states do for some areas – or part of a growth in Central and Eastern European cooperation, which could see the growth of niche areas among the partners?

**JZ:** We are not trying to create a bloc or something like that. It is simply because we are living next to each other. Our main aim is common training.

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# Hungry for growth

**CW: Hungary has been closely involved with the growth of the European CBRN capability for the "European Army". How do you balance your investment in this with that of Nato and bi-lateral commitments – such as you have with Russia?**

JZ: The capability that we are building is to be used in a multinational environment – and that is irregardless of whether it is EU or Nato. Hungary has been proud to be involved in the MN CBRN BN (Multinational CBRN Battalion) from the 3rd rotation. We have frequently provided warning and reporting experts and we were the framework nation for the Joint Assessment Team (JAT) and we are looking forward to continuing that cooperation. The 93rd Regt, that provides recce, and the laboratories have been offered in the past, and will be again. As for the EU MN environment, there is no reason why the same capability cannot be offered; it wouldn't be a different capability. We have areas of CBRN expertise and the same are offered to both parties.

**CW: Can you see yourself trying to grow the capability that you provide multinationally? Is there any intention to grow your capacity so that you could become lead nation, for example?**

JZ: Hungary is not able to become lead nation for the MN CBRN BN; we have only one CBRN battalion and that is impossible

based on MN cooperation. A company-sized framework capability might be offered in the future, but we can't offer lead nation for the BN because of physically available troops. For example, if you want to be lead nation then you must have a regiment of brigade size, like the Germans have, and you must provide HQ and HQ support companies, logistics etc and company-sized high-readiness troops. That would overrun the capability of the Hungarian forces and in the near future I couldn't see an increasing threat that would justify our expansion up to a brigade, but that is just my opinion. We are continuing to eagerly participate in the BN activities. We will also be the framework nation for the JAT (Joint Assessment Team) in a forthcoming rotation.

**CW: How do you balance your investment to Nato with that which you might make with the EU – which takes priority? How do you then manage your bi-laterals?**

JZ: Some of our capabilities can be used in a multinational environment, either by Nato or EU. We do not intend to have a special capability for Nato, EU, or homeland defence – these capabilities are for national and international operations and they can be offered to either. In terms of CBRN cooperation, we are looking to increase cooperation with Ukraine and Serbia, for example; we have limited links but we are going in that direction to have stronger cooperation.

**CW: That's interesting. What is the hoped for end point from that cooperation?**

JZ: The first stage will be to judge their CBRN capabilities correctly and to learn. In cooperation we can learn from each other. As far as I know, the Ukraine has offered capability for Nato and based on that cooperation we might have increased links with the Ukrainian CBRN community to improve our joint understanding.

**CW: What is the role of Hungary's CBRN troops in homeland security? Do you have a specific role, or do you just provide support when asked? How often is this exercised and how have the communication problems, between civilian and military forces, been solved?**

JZ: Links between civil and military forces in terms of homeland security is a Hungarian speciality! The law on Hungarian defence forces stipulate that they must assist in disaster management, and that includes chemical and radiological situations. In practical terms that means that in nuclear disaster management, which

is organised and run nationally by the Disaster Management system, my unit – ACC – operates the Ministerial Information Centre, and this translates into the W&R function: the Nuclear Early Warning System provides nuclear early-warning information for national disaster management. The radiological lab is a pre-assigned capability for disaster management, with a battalion providing ground radiological recce and a decon capability – in case of emergency situations – and the helicopter provides aerial rad recce in case of radiological emergency. These troops are in high-readiness state, within an hour they have to start their assigned task, and these troops regularly exercise with the other parts of the disaster management civilian parts. As an example, in May I ran a rad mobile lab exercise for the Hungarian mobile labs assigned for nuclear disaster management. Many of these labs are civilian labs, so we regularly exercise together, and next year we will have a nuclear disaster exercise and we will also work with our civilians there. These exercises help us to eliminate communications problems because we know that these exist within civilian-military cooperation. If we train together we know capability, procedures and thinking much better. Assistance to civilian authorities in case of an emergency situation is a normal peace-time task for Hungarian forces and CBRN troops.

**CW: The one area that you have not mentioned much is biological detection. Is this something you are going to invest in, or are you going to rely on other multinational partners to provide it on operations and civilian forces to do it in homeland security? Is it a case of just taking samples and giving it to a lab?**

JZ: We can do SIBCRA for Bio. I mentioned the mobile bio lab, which is all part of DIM, and at this moment we are trying to improve the Hungarian defence force biological defence capability. Currently we are looking at what simple, easy-to-use bio detector equipment is available and how it can be integrated into the CBRN recce troops to give them a true CBRN detection capability: as we have chem and rad detection for CBRN troops, but bio DIM belongs to the medical service, which is their speciality. Bio detection and identification is one of the fields that we have to improve. For identification we have the mobile lab and we have cooperation with civilian labs and medical service, if our mobile labs are not good enough.



*Hungarian ACC has invested a great deal into their mobile labs ..©Hungarian MoD*

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