

# Over the Counter



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## Peter Bechtel, Director of the US Army Nuclear and Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction Agency (USANCA), tells Gwyn Winfield about its new direction

There has been a USANCA, in one form or another, since 1952 – when it started life as the Office of Special Weapons Development. As the name might suggest, it was an agency of the Cold War and one that was deeply linked to nuclear weapons. Much has changed since then: in 1973 it became the US Army Nuclear Agency, then the US Army Nuclear and Chemical Agency (in 1976) and recently the US Army Nuclear and Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Agency (2007). Despite the fall of the Berlin Wall and major nuclear disarmament, the agency still retains a major influence on the nuclear arsenal – both offensive and defensive. Yet, as the name suggests, the world has changed and USANCA has had to change with it, undergoing a major “refit” to match the change in threat, with biological agents and toxic industrial chemicals coming under its purview as well.

USANCA’s key functions are defined as to provide Combating WMD planning

support, to identify and advocate supported units CWMD needs, to integrate CWMD planning and training, provide CWMD expertise, manage the Army reactor program, conduct CWMD modelling and simulation, execute CWMD rationalization, standardization and interoperability responsibilities: a lot of this gets boiled down into “counter proliferation”. These tasks involve a wide variety of roles and there is potential for duplication with other agencies. The 20th Support Command’s Joint Task Force Elimination is the Army’s counter proliferation arm, for example, while the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) provides a great deal of the modelling and simulation work for US forces, the CBRN School presumably does a lot of training and the JPEO CBD takes care of a great deal of the standards and requirements bit. So where does USANCA fit in and what does it mean in practice?

“To start at the top,” said Mr Bechtel, “several years ago we, and

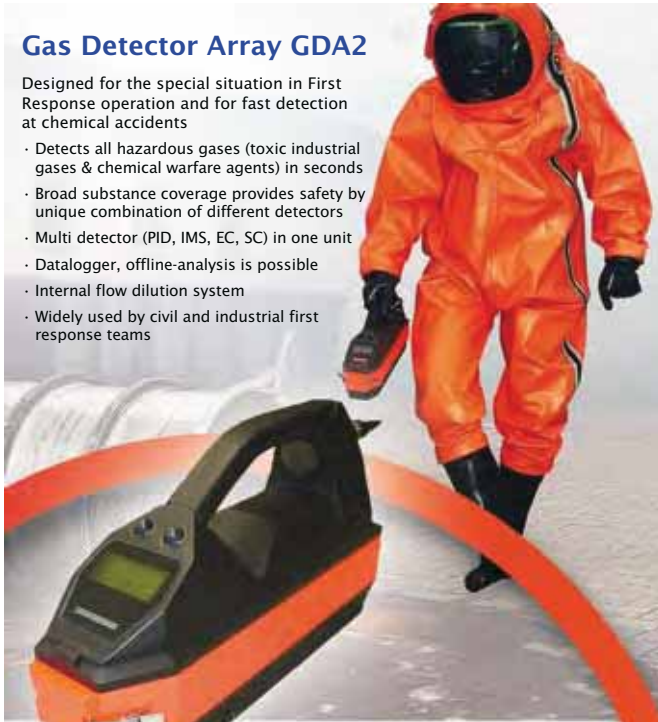
international partners, realized the growing threat of all things WMD, or CBRN. What we did was move USANCA from being a technical resource for nuclear and radiological and move it over into Department of the Army field operating status, so we could better help integrate a variety of activities – that start with the DOTMLPF, or doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, and facility requirements, providing planning and modelling and simulation assistance to Combatant and Army Service Component Commanders (ASCCs). We have an Army Component Command that directly supports each of the geographical commanders, most emphasis in our case goes to US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), that has the President’s Unified Command Plan mission for Combating WMD. We provide direct planning expertise and support for Army component and staffs.”

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Simulation and modelling would seem to be taken up by DTRA's expertise and some of the components of JWARN, JOEF and JEM and elements of 20th Support and other Chemical Officers tend to offer advice to operational commanders. So what is the USANCA role?

Mr Bechtel suggested that it was the fact that it came with the strategic Army vision that provided USANCA's strength. "We, above all else, try to maintain the perspective of the ground tactical and operational commanders, sometimes at the geographic command staff level. Even though there may be Army, or other officers assigned in a Joint and combined role, we have to convey the needs of the Soldiers and units on the ground. So across all the mission areas for CWMD, most particularly in active defense, passive defense, and in protection, we have particular needs as our ground partners have to continue the mission under stressful and complicated conditions – terrain, weather and then WMD, including toxic industrial chemicals (TICs) and toxic industrial materials (TIMs), which are a growing threat. We bring the tangible perspective of the ground commanders into the combatant commanders' planning environment."

While the 20th Support Command does have a role to play in counter-proliferation – the destruction of an opposing force's CBRN stocks – the majority of the counter proliferation role will go to the USAF. Hopefully before ground forces are engaged, the Air Force will have targeted likely dumps/facilities with thermobaric weapons and bunker busters to greatly reduce the threat of them being used. What then is the USANCA role in counter proliferation?

"The Air Force does have a significant role in detection and, along with DTRA, they have some real capabilities in the threats and attribution side. Moving beyond tag, track and locate areas, however, counter proliferation is largely defined by the elimination mission and the Army has worked hard – and USANCA has been part of it – to develop the 20th Support Command Capabilities, both as a force

provider in CONUS for EOD and Tech Escort, and Chemical capability, but also as the nucleus of JTF Elimination, for USSTRATCOM, who have the worldwide mission for elimination. I am aligning counter proliferation into the elimination mission and that is where our role and standing is."

Yet, as Mr Bechtel points out, the elimination role is taken by 20th Support, who are not an executive arm of USANCA, so how do the two organizations work together to avoid overlap?

"I am not going to suggest that there are not overlaps," said Mr Bechtel, "and we are still feeling our way into precisely the roles and missions to make sure that there are no gaps and minimise the overlaps. One overlap is a good one. I have augmented the 20th Command recently with USANCA personnel. I can, because of my competencies, backstop them when they have shortfalls in particular areas of expertise, particularly radiological and nuclear. I am the proponent for Functional Area 52, or Nuclear Counter-Proliferation people in the Army. I am responsible for the training of about 200 or so personnel, many have advanced degrees in physics, micro biology and in addition to their planning capability they have a very detailed technical knowledge as well. I provide planning assistance to the 20th as well as the USSTRATCOM Center for CWMD which is housed in DTRA; so there is overlap and we are seeing it through to make sure we don't step on each other's toes. You can define it this way: USANCA provides the planning expertise, sometime as augmentation, sometimes it is the only planning in a mission area and 20th Support executes elimination operations with their assigned forces."

USANCA are not the only organisation growing and evolving, however. 20th Support is a hugely dynamic Command (see the interview with Col Visser on XX) and couldn't it be, as that unit matures, it takes on its own planning – or does USANCA have a unique skill set that means that it can't be replaced?

Mr Bechtel felt that there was a need for both skill sets. "20th Support should remain focussed, on preparing, training

and deploying and executing and allowing USANCA to do the planning and modelling reachback for the 20th and other component commands. Even though the 20th might be deployed on operations for elimination, for example, all the Army Commands and Component commands are conducting Phase 0 activities to train and work with our partners to improve interoperability, scenario development, training and things like that. In Korea recently we had USANCA personnel supporting US Forces Korea in planning and exercising in this mission area. A lot of our capabilities, particularly 20th Support, are in deploying and execution: USANCA provides the interface between Joint HQ and Component Commanders and the planning staff. A lot of planning has to occur to make sure that exercises and operations run smoothly and we are very busy in ensuring that we fill that gap role."

While the radiological and nuclear piece is still a large part of USANCA, with its counter proliferation and combating weapons of mass destruction mission it is getting lower down the technological food chain – taking in TICs, for example.

Mr Bechtel admitted that there was a lot of work going on in this area, "There is. I won't step on toes as there is some great work being done at Fort Leonard Wood by our partners at the CBRN School and they have recently opened the Terry CBRN Responder Training Facility. I managed to spend some time there and they are incorporating Industrial accident and agents – accelerated or activated by an adversary act – whatever they may be, sabotage, bombing etc – and training for it. We pay close attention to chlorine, because of the large amounts of it transported around the country all the time, as well as a lot more dangerous chemicals inside plants."

Chlorine is a good example of a TIC. There is an abundance of it, it's fairly easy to acquire and it has a lethal effect (in the right concentration). But when did chlorine become a weapon of mass destruction? There is a concern about hyperbole, that if you award chlorine the tag of WMD, then terrorists seek to

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acquire it – during the attacks in Iraq press officers stopped calling it chlorine and called it a choking gas to de-mythologize it.

Mr Bechtel explained why chlorine, and other TICs, had become WMD, “Any weapon that is capable of a high order of destruction, or is used to affect a large number of people, is the way that I define WMD. There are some high-end activities, such as RDD, but even at the lower end, more readily available to some of our adversaries – not limited to terrorist groups, there are some even criminal or insurgency groups that want to get their hands on it. The effect of 500 to ,000 folks in a ten block area is a significant shut down of the economy and culture, confidence of the citizens and the effects can categorise themselves as Mass’.”

As well as the more strategic goals of USANCA they do have some operatives that do a great deal of outreach, such as the CTOP (CWMD Training, Operations and Plans) Branch Officers, NEAT (Nuclear Employment Augmentation Teams) and CITAC (CWMD International Treaties, Agreements and Capabilities) Branch. Again, at first sight, some of these (with the exception of NEAT – not many people plan nuclear strikes any more ) look like they could be involved in duplication. Modern chemical officers, especially those involved in the th Chemical Brigade, for example, should be capable of providing fairly robust and tailored training and exercising plans – why do they need USANCA?

Mr Bechtel came back to the fact that it was the level of knowledge that USANCA operatives have that provide the value, “While the conventional Chemical officer does have an ever broadening skill set, and I give a lot of credit to Fort Leonard Wood for the training and leader development that the Engineer and Chemical and other schools are doing, but, in terms of a Nuclear and CWMD officer, the knowledge is so deep – in terms of physics and chemistry (many of them have advanced degrees or teach at West Point) – that they bring a technical side that you need to have a dedicated focus on to develop. Once they are in a staff, like 20th Support, the expertise utterly

complements each other without a lot of overlap as they recognize what we do and we recognise their expertise.”

CITAC would seem to be a function that could sit quite nicely in the JPEO, however, as standards and agreements are not necessarily joint service. Does the fact that USANCA looks at requirements and standards from a single-service point of view create problems when working with a joint acquisition agency?

Mr Bechtel said not. “We have a good relationship with JPEO, M Reeves has been a keynote speaker at our conference and has been a real help to USANCA. What I do is work closely on the requirements side, the Joint Staff lead a Joint Capability Integration Development System (JSIDS) and we have input into the JSIDS. While the JPEO really focuses on acquisition we stay on requirements. An example of this is that I am concerned with the survivability of mission-critical equipment in a nuclear environment, most notably by high-altitude EMP. So we do a lot of testing at facilities of EMP effects on our components and equipment and we want to make sure that newly fielded and acquired systems have the necessary couplings, faraday cages etc, to ensure that they can continue to operate in an nuclear effects environment. I know nuclear effects are narrow, but it is complex and there may be any number of elements of CBRN that are thrown at us by a desperate adversary.”

While USANCA has started to focus on other elements of WMD – it provides scientists to the CBRN School to review their biological course material, for example – this has not been at the cost of their focus on the nuclear/radiological side, as Mr Bechtel was keen to point out. “In terms of our *raison d’être* and unequivocal expertise in nuclear and radiological, that will remain a core element of the USANCA mission and projects. We continue to be the sitting member to the US

overnment Nuclear Weapons Council Standing and Safety Committee , we provide a great deal of targeting and effects planning capability into Joint Staff and USSTRATCOM, I oversee and certify the Army Reactor Operations out in New Mexico, so there always has to be

a center for nuclear expertise and that will be USANCA and I will retain parts of my organization to do those specific nuclear tasks. Having said that, we continue to integrate a lot of different doctrine and policy development of the other areas of WMD into other mission areas – I even contribute to some of the work that is being done for the active defense side.”

While 20th Support might still be finding its footing, it is not the only one; even with all the heritage behind it, USANCA is still looking to develop. In a recent interview in the JPEO’s Chem Bio Defense Quarterly, Mr Bechtel stated that the Agency was going to look for a more active role in non-proliferation, treaty compliance, Army surety, and Congressional intent. In the same way that USANCA is trying to be the 20th Support Commands backstop for expertise, it may well be the same backstop for a range of other initiatives that fall between the cracks – the US Army’s CBRN “sweeper”

Mr Bechtel suggested to *CBRN World* that his challenges for the next two to three years were: “Trying to continue to improve integration of activities among consequence management responders. Developing the response plans for chemical accidents at our Army chemical munitions sites. Trying to develop and apply some leadership to CWMD doctrine and making sure that the current fight, the

WOT (lobal War on terrorism) is cognisant of some of those concepts: I worry that our WOT adversaries may learn and exploit industrial agents and RDDs, our WOT adversaries may learn and exploit those capabilities. Lastly integrating CBRN survivability into capability development has to remain important. The ground Army is going through some large changes to enable us to do dispersed operations in remote locations with austere footprints, but that leaves some vulnerabilities as well, and I want to make sure that we can’t be disrupted or defeated by EMP or a similar device. We have a good deal of survivable equipment, don’t get me wrong, but we have to continue to develop and anticipate an adaptive adversary.”

For an immediate staff of only 5 it is going to be a busy time

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