

*Lieutenant Colonel Bernd Allert, former Deputy Chief Theatre Force Protection & Senior Officer CBRN Defence, assesses the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF's) ability to deal with TIC and TIM incidents*

# Dance to the Music of TIM

CBRN weapons, or toxic industrial materials (TIMs), have not been employed in the area of operations (AOO) of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) so far. At present, there are no indications at all of insurgents intending to use CBRN weapons in the near future either. Nevertheless, letters of unknown origin threatening suicide attacks involving the use of "suffocating" gases have occasionally been received, and there have been indications that "unknown arms dealers smuggled radioactive material to Afghanistan". From time to time, ISAF personnel or

members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have seized ammonium nitrate or hydrogen peroxide – substances which could have been used for the manufacture of conventional explosives or the production of drugs. In summary, the CBRN threat level has been assessed as being very low. Natural or man-made environmental damage as well as endemic plagues have been considered to be a more serious threat. Although rather unlikely at the moment, an attack on ISAF or ANSF personnel with TIMs as an asymmetric weapon cannot be ruled out.

CBRN defence is a command responsibility. Thus it is primarily the Commander of ISAF (COMISAF) who is responsible for this functional area. He may delegate this responsibility to subordinate commanders, however. The commanders at their respective level will then be responsible for CBRN defence in their areas of responsibility, and for plans implementing the intent of the higher command. HQ ISAF has established a Theatre Force Protection (TFP) and CBRN Defence Group which, as part of the CJ3 Division, reports to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCOS OPS). This group advises COMISAF on all matters related to theatre force protection and CBRN defence. The core tasks of this group include the permanent estimate of the CBRN defence situation and the formulation of appropriate measures, as well as the monitoring and adjustment of CBRN defence measures in the ISAF area of operations.



*...or I'll fire! The Italians ran decontamination exercises in Afghanistan ©Allert*

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# Dance to the Music of TIM

On order, the group will establish and operate a CBRN Area Control Centre (CBRN ACC) so as to evaluate the effects of CBRN/TIM attacks on current operations and to operate the CBRN reporting and warning service. From July 2007 to January 2008 the group comprised a leader (GBR wing commander), his deputy (also acting as senior CBRN defence officer), a senior force protection officer (NOR major/commander), and a senior NCO (USA sergeant first class) serving as a staff assistant. Despite the great importance of CBRN defence, however, activities of this task area did not dominate the daily routine.

What was the situation like at the subordinate commands? The commanders of the Regional Commands (RCs) had to designate a CBRN advisor within their staffs who was to act as a point of contact for all CBRN defence-related matters both at HQ ISAF and at the respective subordinate level. On order, the RCs were to establish and operate a CBRN Sub-Collection Centre (CBRN SCC) and to follow the CBRN reporting and warning procedures (in accordance with Allied Tactical Publication ATP-45(C), Reporting NBC Attacks, and Predicting and Warning of Associated Hazards and Hazard Areas).

The following full-time CBRN defence units were stationed and operational in the ISAF area of operations: one Czech CBRN defence platoon (OPCON COMISAF); one Italian CBRN defence platoon (OPCON COM RC (S)); one German CBRN defence platoon (OPCON DEU Combat Service Support Contingent); one USA CBRN reconnaissance team (OPCON COM RC (E)); one environmental protection/biological laboratory (OPCON COM RC (E) as well).

The capabilities were most varied, given the personnel and materiel available. Especially noteworthy in this context are the CBRN reconnaissance capabilities, with armoured CBRN reconnaissance vehicles of the Italian and German platoons and the Czech and Italian sampling and identification of biological, chemical, radiological

agents (SIBCRA) capability, as well as the BC laboratories of both platoons. All units had decontamination capabilities, although mostly for self-decontamination. The German CBRN defence platoon was also able to treat and purify water.

An essential mission of ISAF's CBRN defence forces is the reconnaissance of suspected TIM areas. Joint Forces Command Headquarters Brunsum (JFC HQ BS) had tasked COMISAF to establish a database of all suspected TIM areas in the ISAF AOO in order to minimise the risks for the military personnel employed, but also for the local civilian population. The intended focus in this context was on the identification of toxic industrial chemicals (TICs) so as to neutralise them with appropriate means if necessary. I will not go into detail here for understandable reasons. As you can imagine, considerable damage might be caused by the spontaneous release of approximately four tons of ammonia employed in a slaughterhouse for cooling purposes. This TIM reconnaissance is a success story in two respects. First, the reconnaissance was conducted on a combined and joint basis. One mission, for example, was carried out by the Italian and Czech CBRN reconnaissance forces which were protected by a BGR force protection platoon and led by a German lieutenant colonel. Second, there were 50 potentially suspected areas in the region of RC (C) at the beginning of the deployment of HQ ISAF X/2. By the end of the deployment only five were left. For the future it will be important to gradually extend TIM reconnaissance to the other Regional Commands. The TIM database is accessible by all ISAF personnel on the ISAF SECRET website at all times.

A second CBRN defence priority was set by (starting) the establishment of a CBRN reporting and warning system. Apart from the fact that STANAG 2150 NCB (7th Edition), Nato Standards of Proficiency for NBC Defence, requires Nato commands to have CBRN reporting and warning capabilities, the headquarters of the Regional

Commands were to be able – as already mentioned – to establish and operate a CBRN sub-collection centre on order. Against this background, HQ ISAF had been tasked to conduct appropriate CBRN reporting and warning exercises. For this purpose, the TFP and CBRN Defence Group developed the monthly exercise KINETIC COMET. HQ ISAF acted in two ways. In its capacity as source level, it transmitted an NBC 1 ROTA report (observer report) at an unspecified point in time. The RCs then had to prepare an NBC 2 ROTA report (observation report) and transmit it to HQ ISAF – now acting as CBRN ACC – and to warn the source level – ie HQ ISAF – with an NBC 3 ROTA report (warning report). Thus certain training requirements were identified which have gradually been and are still being satisfied by HQ ISAF.

Allied Joint Publication AJP-3.14, Allied Joint Doctrine for Force Protection, defines the term "force protection" as "measures and means to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, facilities, materiel, operations and activities from threats and hazards in order to preserve the freedom of action and the operational effectiveness". CBRN defence, as an element of force protection, has thus contributed to the success of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and will continue to do so.

Major General Champoux, Chief of Staff/HQ ISAF, recognised the outstanding performance of the Czechs as well as of the Italian CBRN Defence Platoon with a "letter of appreciation" to the Commanders of the 31st (Czech) CBRN Defence Brigade and to 7th (Italian) NBC Defence Regiment.

Last, but not least, mention should also be made of an essential achievement of the CBRN defence forces employed in Afghanistan – the soldiers of the Italian CBRN defence platoon make the best pizza in the entire Middle East!

Lieutenant Colonel Bernd Allert was deployed with HQ ISAF X/2 as Deputy Chief Theatre Force Protection & Senior Officer CBRN Defence from July 2007 to January 2008