

Winter 2008

WORLD



Continental Op
Serbian, French, Dutch
and Korean CBRN

Quincy CB
CBRNE Forensics and
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The Third Man
Developments in Civil CBRN:
breaking cover

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Drugs – Just say NO!

It would be nice to suggest that Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Nato's Secretary General, and General John Craddock, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, are such close readers of *CBRNe World* magazine that they decided to increase the role of Nato troops in Afghanistan to incorporate the counter-narcotics (CN) mission (See *CBRNe World* Autumn 2008 p.49). Their announcement on 10 October stated: "At the request of the Afghan government, I am grateful that the North Atlantic Council has given me the authority to expand ISAF's role in counter narcotic operations.... It will allow us to reduce the funding and income to insurgents which will enhance force protection..." General John Craddock. The devil, especially in counter narcotics, will be in the detail – which is perilously sparse at the moment. Afghanistan is a very different proposition for CN operations. Usually you can draw a thick line between drug manufacturers and terrorists; in Afghanistan the local population is involved to such a degree that that line is a dotted one – too much squeeze on the agricultural worker will damage, rather than enhance, force protection.

The grand strategic issue of counter narcotics is (thankfully) outside the remit of this magazine. What concerns us is the impact of the CN mission on CBRN soldiers. The past quarter has seen me give two counter-narcotics presentations, one at the *CBRNe World* conference – *CBRNe Convergence* in Bucharest – and one at the *CBRN Commanders and Commandants* conference – in Liberec, Czech Republic. Both of those conferences, despite the different audiences, saw the same result. The US and UK – those nations that have either got some counter-narcotics experience or will face the greatest challenge – paid attention and (in a taste of his own medicine for the Editor) asked searching and pointed questions. The other nations sat back, and wondered quite what it had to do with them – they were CBRN soldiers, and as such had nothing to do with CN ops.

The latter attitude is wrong, for a number of reasons. The first is that it shows a complete lack of foresight and planning. Counter narcotic ops are going to need soldiers trained in Level A, armed with a variety of detectors able to identify and classify chemicals so they can be stored safely and handed off to the relevant contractor. Where the hell are those skills and assets going to come from if not the CBRN soldier? The previous attitude that treated CN ops as a "might happen" is a luxury of the past. Saceur and Nato Sec Gen have made it part of the mission in Afghanistan. Once that pays dividends and terrorist funds start to diminish, this mission is going to become more likely. The other major reason is that this is an opportunity going begging. Too many nations in Nato – and elsewhere – are still based on the old "gallons of VX" threat, they have a small recce element underpinned by a mammoth decon capability. How valid is that capability now? How does it get adapted and stay relevant? There is no doubt that it is needed, but it's still based on large armour formations – a currently obsolete brand of warfighting. New Nato nations are usually the most opportunistic: unable to compete in the tanks, planes and C4i



Nato now has the authority to be involved in the CN mission in Afghanistan ©DoD

world, they have gained niche capabilities – search and rescue, special forces or CBRN. Yet, largely, they have modelled their CBRN response on the old elements of Nato. The Germans and Czechs, the CBRN doyens of Nato, are unprepared to engage with CN, they have too much conservatism and too many assets to manage a quick volte face. But what of those nations that don't? Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia – this mission is tailor-made for them. It will require small, well-equipped and -trained teams; light and mobile, they will be able to have an immediate impact on the Nato mission. Soon they will find that their sensitive site exploitation skills are in demand with other nations, the plaudits that they get on the battlefield will gain them the appreciation – and probably the dollars – of the US and they will have a hundred times the impact on the battlefield of any decon company.

Are they stepping forward? No... We don't do counter narcotics, none of the other big nations do counter narcotics – it's difficult and messy and we don't want to stand out...

The UK will also slump shoulders on the CN mission, despite being lead nation for counter narcotics in Afghanistan. It has rerolled large elements of the Joint CBRN Regiment and denuded it of its command element – while extremely capable at an individual level it is a spent force for the next 12 months. Inevitably, the US will have to stand up to take on parts of the mission, with large parts of Afghanistan under its control – and no-one else picking up the strain – there will be little choice. But the US does not have the monopoly on good ideas, and large organisations adapt to change very slowly. Politically charged and divisive on the ground, what is needed in Afghan CN ops is a Muslim Nato member that has a CBRN capability – yet Turkey, who would be the obvious choice, will be the least likely of all to take up that burden. Counter narcotics missions will be a major shot in the arm for CBRN forces, it will keep them relevant, funded and in the Commander's eye, yet no-one wants to take them up. Instead they would rather concentrate on their decon forces. Change is coming, and those that say yes to it first will gain the advantages; those who say no will only lose.