

Lieutenant Colonel Xavier Lefebvre, Commanding Officer of the French Dragon Regiment, explains to Gwyn Winfield how the new White Paper on defence will impact on his command

Thanks to the new Defence White paper CBRN defence in France is likely to become much better ©CBRNe World



It is very easy to be blasé about defence White Papers: they tend to appear in one country or another with depressing regularity, often offering a bland repetition of well understood facts and at such a grand strategic level that CBRN is not even considered. The French White Paper that came out in the Summer this year confounded both expectations, outlining a cut of 50,000 defence jobs and putting CBRN defence right at the core of the French MoD's mission set. President Sarkozy instigated some of the broadest changes in the French MoD for a generation, and far from CBRN being the love child of NBC (No Body Cares) it has become the prodigal son.

While France has promised an increase in the military budget in 2012, it is lean times for most of the French armed forces – with the exception of ISTAR (Information, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Radar) assets which will be expanded for their Intelligence role. While CBRN might not be at the same level, the fact remains that it is only one of two army branches that will be expanded. As Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre explained, “The White Paper was fundamentally a funding document. It highlighted the need for Intelligence, but also identified the threat and risk of CBRN as one of the two major challenges that needed to be dealt with – and this was the first time it was recognised as such. President Sarkozy on 17 June mentioned that the terrorism, including the use of CBRN, was the most likely threat, particularly for the national mission. He commented on the proliferation of WMD and also highlighted the problems of TICs and environmental health hazards – but also pandemics. This was interesting as the White Paper is all about the global approach, spanning both defence and homeland security. The consequences of that for the Regiment was that CBRN defence is going to be part of the effort to improve homeland capability and it confirmed the expected expansion of the Regiment. After the White Book and the Reform of the Armed Forces – that happened on 24 July – there were some capabilities that would be preserved (infantry), some that would be reduced (armour, artillery, engineers, anti-aircraft) and two capabilities that would be reinforced (Intelligence and CBRN). As far as the Regiment is concerned the growth that I spoke about in March [See *CBRNe World* Spring 2008] has been

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# First Notification

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The Hague is the "City of Peace, Justice and Security," as well as being home to the International Criminal Court, the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Europol; a host of other international and European organisations make The Hague their home. It comes as no great surprise then that *CBRNe World* has chosen The Hague as the venue of their next CBRNe Convergence conference. The first conference was a great success (see pages 22-27) and as Major General Steve Reeves, Joint Program Executive Officer for Chemical and Biological Defence in the US, stated in Bucharest, "The notion of convergence has been around for a while, but to my knowledge this is the first time that there has been a conference to address it."

The Netherlands is an obvious choice for a CBRNe conference. The Dutch have a number of excellent ideas and their work on civil-military cooperation in homeland defence epitomises much of what CBRNe convergence is all about (more information can be found on pages 60-63 and the

Spring 2008 edition of *CBRNe World*). The conference will again host sessions on the challenges that face responders and agencies worldwide – forensics, bio detection, IEDs, counter narcotics, decontamination and protection – and will be a streamed event to allow you to maximise the benefits to your organisation. As with the previous event, these speakers will be picked individually by Gwyn Winfield, editor of *CBRNe World*, to represent the best thinking and developments in CBRN.

CBRNe Convergence 2008 had the largest exhibition of CBRNe equipment in Europe this year, and we feel confident that 2009 will deserve the same accolade. This will give you a chance to see the latest technology in the market and gauge your needs for the next five to ten years. The conference will also run a spouses' programme and a third day of events and workshops is currently under negotiation.

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confirmed. The announcement stated that the Regiment would get their additional decon Squadron, would reinforce their light role teams up to 12 and would have our new Detect Bio system. We currently already share one bio detection system with the air force, the EFABT, Theatre Bio Alert. This system is not identical to Detect Bio, it is an earlier incarnation; but it is similar enough to allow us to train on it with the air force. In the middle of 2009 we will have a new decon facility, which will allow us to train with different decon solutions. It has been brought forward from 2010 because of funds made available by the reform, as has the new squadron's building. All the new infrastructure on the Regiment's base will be completed by 2010."

Like many countries, the French MoD had provision to provide forces for civilian authorities if requested. Under the VigiPirate security system, created in 1978, there was a mechanism for military aid to a civilian authority, but this had never been fully explored. Despite this, the French MoD has pervasively close links with first responders. Like the US Coast Guard, units such as the Paris Fire Brigade belong to the engineers and the Gendarmerie (who are under military control and are responsible for approximately half of France's national territory – those areas with a population under 10,000). This provides them with a large amount of strategic, if not tactical, linkage. The White Paper has decided to drive these strategic links down to the operational level, and this will provide France with an integrated national CBRN defence system.

"The White Paper also had an impact on non-military defence forces though," Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre continued, "so all first responders, fire and civil security units [that belong to the Ministry of Defence] will have increased CBRN capability. Areas outside MoD control – such as hospitals in each regional department – will have a new decon capability, and there will also be a recce capability for [civilian] fire assets. Hospitals will also get a new pre-hospital decon system. This will be rolled out in the Western Administrative region first [which the Regiment in Fontevraud inhabits], but all hospitals will have this capability. The Regiment will continue to contribute to national security and will work at exchanging experience with

civilian units; we will contribute to exercises, as we did at Rennes recently, and police and Gendarmerie will be equipped with CBRN protection, allowing them to operate under CBRN conditions. The mission of the Regiment won't change, however. Our primary mission will remain the deployed support mission and the second mission will be in support of the civilian population – including the national theatre. So while it doesn't change we do have unique capabilities that the civilians don't have – heavy decon for vehicles and infrastructure, for example. And we will support the first responders when they get exhausted or overwhelmed. It is estimated that after 12 hours the fire fighters would need to be relieved."

Personally, I think these developments are hugely important for French national CBRN defence. Previously I have criticised the French national CBRN defence system as too little and relying on pockets of excellence – such as Paris and Marseille. But improving the equipment and also the training (according to the White Paper a new joint civil/military CBRN training school is likely to be created) will bring France up to the level that the threat demands. What is surprising is that this is happening at a time of constriction within the French army, and it is a sign of the political support this has that traditional favourites – such as engineers and cavalry – have been eclipsed by the CBRN soldier.

Wider political integration has also been at the heart of the White Paper, as Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre explained: "We are also to improve our interoperability with civilian response organisations at the administrative zone Level. A military defence zone staff (MOD) is already co-located within the admin zone staff (MOI), so there would be a joint military-civilian staff at the zone level. At an incident there is an Event Director, who is to be a civilian, and military units must be able to operate under his directions; so we need the communication and information systems (CIS) and procedures to allow this. We already cooperate with fire assets, but this will improve throughout the whole territory. The Regiment is already ahead of the curve in this respect, but the White Paper is going to force the rest of the army to be more interoperable. And this will also be the task of the civilians; it has to work at both ends. Wherever a

military unit is deployed on national territory it will be under military operational command, but civilian tactical command. The White Paper outlines that there must be 10,000 people dedicated to homeland security. But this is a capability rather than a designated unit – so it will be composed of Infantry, Intelligence, CBRN etc. This is new. Previously there was contingency under the VigiPirate plan for this, but it had never been clearly established. This now needs to be taken into account and we must ensure that we are interoperable. It is not just the civilian mission that has been outlined, the operational contract of the army is the ability to send 30,000 troops on one major operations out to a maximum distance of 7/8,000 km. Our Regiment is sized to be able to support this force of 30,000, but also has to be able to provide the capability to contribute to supporting a high-readiness force of 5,000. We will be sized, equipped and trained to fulfil both missions at the same time."

Training is another major change enshrined in the White Paper. Previously the School was based in Draguignan, in the South of France, while the CBRN regiment is based in Fontevraud in the North. Now the two bases are going to be brought far closer together, with the School being based at Saumur – approximately 10 miles from Fontevraud. Saumur has had a long history in the French military, being the historical home of cavalry training, and will now generate benefits to France's CBRN defence – at home and away. "The centre at Saumur currently has armoured cavalry and intelligence education and training centres (or, to give them their French acronyms, EA ABC and CEERAT, respectively). The NBC defence schools will join them next year and in 2011/2012 will be joined by the Junior Staff Officers College (EEM), which is currently in Compiègne – 60 km north east of Paris. This facility educates army captains and is mandatory education before becoming a senior officer. So eventually there will be four schools in Saumur, and all of them and the Dragon Regiment will have common support – a land defence base – and be one of the 90 defence bases of the armed forces. All 90 of them will share support assets, from 2010, so this will mean that the Regiment will just be the deployable part. All the base logistics the Regiment currently has will be placed in this pool.



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This will be the same principle for all army regiments; all non-deployable parts will be shared in the Defence Base Support Group.”

As is often the case, the School and the CBRN regiment have close ties, and Lieutenant Colonel Lefebvre outlined some of the advantages that having the two closer together would bring. “This will create a CBRN centre of excellence. The NBC Defence Centre is not just for the Regiment though – that only makes up about 25% of the school’s output – but it will have the advantage, for example, of bringing the new training and education facility for the VAB [the French equivalent of the Fuchs/Fox Recce Vehicle] – which is currently in Draguignan – much closer and allow us to vastly improve our VAB training; but this will be one of the last elements to join the centre. Their proximity will also allow us to train in their lab, which is where we can use Yperite and bio simulant, and that will be a big benefit, as opposed to having to send people 1,000 km to the south. Currently we have two VAB and two decon assets deployed at the School for training purposes, and this will mean that they will be much more available if we need them. It will also allow us to send troops to train more frequently – officers and NCOs. It will be more convenient for both, it will allow them to improve the quality and content of courses and education; we will have direct contact with instructors, and this will benefit both sides as it will allow a more fluid exchange of ideas. It will be the same for the doctrine side. So for field manuals for the Regiment, which they do – implementation of recce platoons, for example – they will now have a permanent contact with us.”

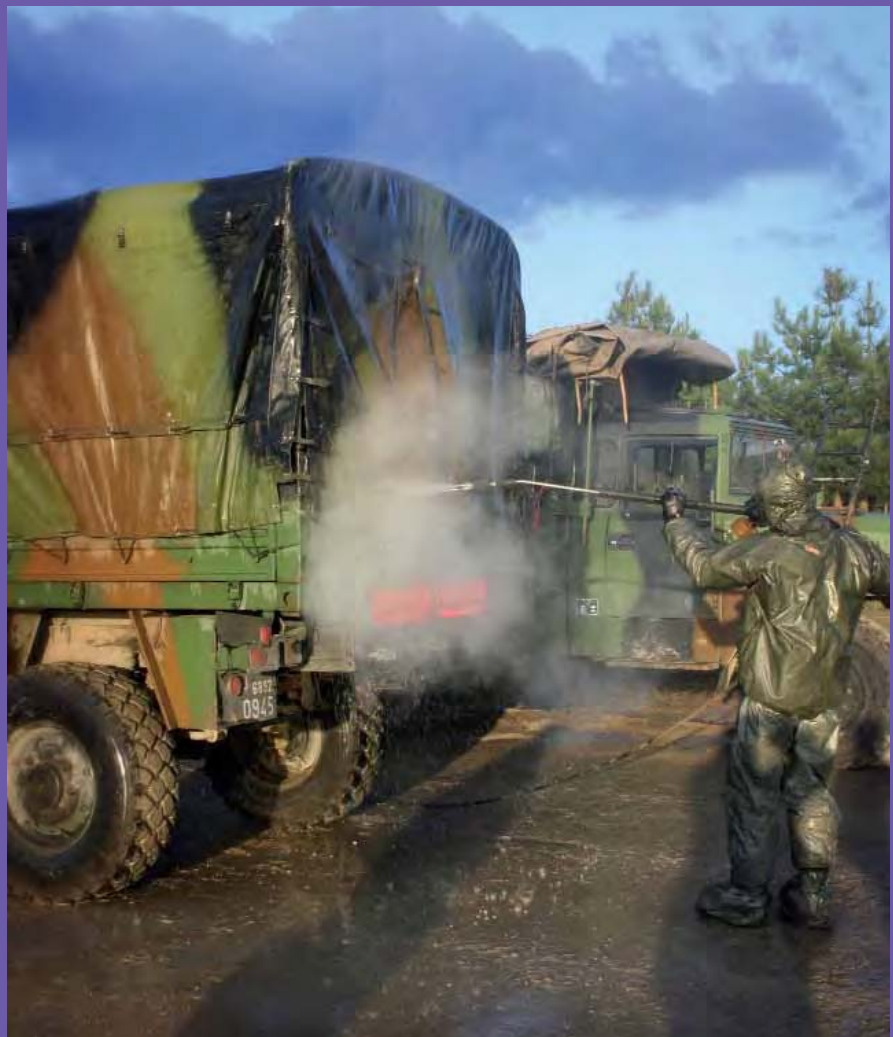
As with many White Papers much of the funding comes out of the cost savings, and the rationalisation of the force and the army bases is going to provide a great deal of the increase. Some of the increase will also come from the new support mechanism that the Colonel mentioned, where the only troops under Lieutenant Colonel’s Lefebvre’s command will be the deployable part. Everything else would be shared amongst the new, smaller number of bases. This would seem to be a negative, forcing an increased amount of operational imperative down to the lowest level, yet the CO suggested that in many respects it would be a good thing.

“As a regiment commander it will allow me to focus on operational issues, far more than I can do now. It is difficult to say quite how much impact it will have as it is only a concept at the moment. We will have to be careful about the link with the Defence Base Support Group. Feeding, non military vehicles, clothing, human resources and budgeting will be taken out of my hands, except for training. It will allow us to be more active, currently 75% of my time is taken up on human resources – though I will still have the responsibility to manage and nurture my men – and that will still take up a majority of my time on a daily basis.”

There is no doubt that all of this will be a major shot in the arm for French CBRN and it could well see France becoming the leading nation on the Eastern Atlantic for CBRN (since the UK

seems dead set on imploding its capability). The fact that its CBRN soldiers now have a defined role in homeland security is also a major advantage and one that will be compounded by the location of the Army NBC Defence School. By the time the last elements of the School are in place the strengths, and weaknesses, of the new shared support system should have become apparent and it will be interesting to see how French CBRN defence in general, and the Dragon Regiment in particular, develop the advantages from this White Paper.

This is not very clear yet. Its is understood as an apart training center dedicated to the improvement of the interoperability between MOD and MOI. The possibility of a merging process for the services’ own centers is still under study.



*The increase in the Regiment’s decon troops was confirmed by the White Paper  
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