



Ready for Duty? Conventional Army forces will be taking on a lot of the CBRN mission from the IRR. ©ADF

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Dave Lavers, CBRN Director at the Counter IED Task Force within the Australian Department of Defence, tells Gwyn Winfield about how they are improving their CBRN capability across the Australian Defence Force.

We live in a bi-polar world, and if the Northern hemisphere of CBRN defence is being held by the US, Canada, Germany and the Czech Republic, then the South is held by Australia and Singapore. So much of CBRN defence has its roots in the old NBC threat that there tends to be a NATO country bias, but one of the major axes of CBRN co-operation and research actually runs North-South (rather than East-West), with Australia/New Zealand, Canada, UK and US (AUSCANUKUS). Previously CBRN defence in Australia was led by the Incident Response Regiment (IRR – see *CBRNe World Spring 2007*), and while they will still have a major role to play, CBRN is moving out of Special Forces and into the “mainstream” Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Part of the way that this is transitioning is via the CBRN Directorate within the Counter IED (C-IED) Task Force. The name seems a giveaway to the capability – that it

will be CBRNE or counter-terrorist focused, rather than conventional – but Dave Lavers said that the reason was more practical than that, and had greater benefits. “The directorate came about in February 2007, following capability analysis, and looking around CBRN deficiencies we decided we needed to focus on CBRN in a deliberate way,” he said. “We were placed under the C-IED Task Force, and that gives us a credible position in the force, as it means we are an *operationally* focused unit. In respect to conventional versus terrorist use, our position in the Task Force allows us to focus across the full spectrum of operations – I also lead the Secretariat for the CBRN Steering Committee, chaired by a two-star general. This committee is made up of people within the organisation at the one-star level, and make decisions on CBRN business and follow a risk management approach for CBRN issues.”

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Throughout the Directorate, and even further to the Defence White Paper, there is this focus on CBRN being either part of the operation or force protection. As opposed to other nations, such as Germany, which have it as a separate arm, Australia has tried to embed it within the force as much as it can be – that way it is harder to extract, but also becomes more familiar. Australia, and the ADF, also tend to be expeditionary focused since most of their neighbours are so far away, and this also forces together a certain amount of jointery. “The CBRN Directorate is a joint organisation, which is why it is part of the new Joint Capability Co-ordination Division,” said Lavers. “It moved out of the Capability Development Group in 2007; CBRN is a key joint capability area. The CBRN Directorate is about co-ordination to make sure our forces can operate efficiently in a joint, multi-agency environment. In respect to the Air Force, Army and Navy, each of these has representation on our CBRN Steering Committee, and we use the committee to draw together the joint issues.”

CBRN used to be seen as pretty much a land threat; air forces could (in theory) “fly off” contamination, while the navies would stay in blue water. Yet as the threat has changed from conventional to non-conventional, these arms that could once stay aloof are having to refocus. Naval forces especially are looking at the threat to vessels tied up alongside, both from direct attack (from “crack dusts”) and indirect (from attacks on ports with large amounts of toxic industrial chemicals). Mr Lavers admitted this is no different for Australia. “The CBRN Directorate is also focused on addressing issues in support of the respective services,” he said. “Over the past three years that I have been Director I have been looking at the issues that are critical. One such naval issue, for example, is the challenge of being alongside – embarking and disembarking in a contaminated environment. So we are

well positioned to offer joint linkages into the services and make sure we can monitor current capability and then plan future CBRN needs.”

While the Directorate might be planning future needs, there is a large body of work going on in equipping current ones. Central to this are two major projects: Joint Program (JP) 2110 and JP 3025. JP 2110 comes in two stages – Phase 1A and 1B. 1A is a “stocktake” procurement that is a COTS or MOTS contract to bring the ADF up to a standard level, in line with other allied forces’ chemical and radiological point detectors. It is worth less than AU\$100m and has an Initial Operating Capability (IOC) of 2011. 1B is for CBRN DIM, warning and reporting, PPE, Med CM and hazard management (a catch-all term, but presumably largely decon) equipment. It has a contract value of up to AU\$500m and has an IOC of 2015.

JP3025 is for the Deployable IRR Capability, which is designed to improve the specialist CBRN capability within the IRR, with a focus on rapid deployability. This is also a sub-AU\$100m contract, with an IOC of 2016. When elements of other contracts are added in, such as Land 125, this is an investment of approximately AU\$600m – not a small chunk of change in anyone’s book.

But what will this future-equipped force look like? At the lower end there will be a bit of ground floor work on bringing up the individual protection and detection piece, but what about the middle tier – the one below the IRR? What sort of model is Australia basing it on? There are numerous examples: a greater SF piece, like the Joint Incident Response Unit (JIRU) in Canada; a CBR medical unit like the USMC’s Chemical/Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF); a smaller specialised squad like the UK’s Light Role Teams or the German Special Recce Platoons; or something larger like the 48th Chemical Brigade in 20th Support Command in the US? Mr Lavers admitted they had been

looking at all those units and had learned a great deal from them, but that this would be an Australian design. “The Army is developing the concept of the Modular Engineer Force, which has a dedicated CBRNE squadron in it, and this is a general land forces capability which will enhance the Special Forces element,” he said. “The 2009 White Paper singles out the IRR as a unit to be enhanced, and it talks about building it with a greater off-shore deployable capability, particularly in the counter-WMD phase”.

“In respect to what we are building, we are designing the joint force over time; we will be doing the analysis and looking at our CBRN needs, benchmarking other nations and seeing what they have, and pulling out the best of those things and see what we can put together. Australia recognises CBRN is a low-threat but high consequence event, and clearly staffing the entire specialist resource budget into this on a full-time basis would mean we’d run out of resources, so over time the IRR will be developed in its capacity to counter-WMD, which it already does well, and this will be improved.”

Semantics never really travel well – what is one man’s CBRNE is another man’s CBRNe – and this is the same with counter-WMD (CWMD). To the US, CWMD is often synonymous with taking the fight to the enemy, destroying his stockpile at such a time and place that it is not a threat to allied (and hopefully civilian) centres of gravity. So is this part of the White Paper – that Australia is going to be a counter-WMD taskforce in the region, taking the fight – via naval and air assets – to the enemy? Or, alternatively, is it the “buzzwordery” beloved of White Papers throughout the world? “This does need to be defined quite clearly,” said Mr Lavers. “In terms of CWMD, the White Paper stated the government has decided to ‘enhance CWMD capability of the ADF by establishing deployable defensive CWMD capability in the IRR in

support of land forces or special forces activities. This will include decontamination capabilities, as well as area and closed surveys, technical advice and sophisticated measurement capabilities.' [P86 *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century*. Available here, www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/ Ed]. Clearly because it is an SF mission you have to let your imagination run wild because the detail is classified, but the Government is interested in making sure this capability is available to undertake CWMD missions within international law, obligations and treaties. We clearly can't be like the US, as we are not a nuclear power and don't have the infrastructure the US has, so there will be differences, but over time you might see – and this is just my opinion – more of a resemblance between our CBRN forces and Canada's, in that we are like-sized forces and are both non-nuclear nation. We will have to work hard, and this is where we value our relationship with the US, UK and Canada to work towards building our capability. So, as our White Paper discusses, building our CWMD out to 2030 will be through a capability analysis process and its definition."

Attempting to nail down the definition brings to mind Lewis Carroll's comment: "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less". Dave Lavers admitted the exact definition of what was going to be behind CWMD has still to be confirmed. "CWMD can be all things to all people; it needs to be defined in great detail and bounded by international conventions. It is important that we remember that a CBRN capability is no good if it is just held in one force – we need to be CBRN-enabled if our forces are to be deployed on a mission. We have to make sure we've equipped our forces to undertake the mission they are required to do, so that if they are required to take action they have the appropriate training and resources to do so. Over time our notion of CWMD



What will the future Australian specialist CBRN force look like? ©ADF

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will become clearer, and I hope the CBRN Directorate will be involved in setting these objectives and moving forward to meet them."

Yet there has to be some form of definition being evolved because of the Joint Programs – the bedrock on which CWMD will be built. So while there will be the "common soldiery" at one extreme, and the Special Forces capability of the IRR at the other, what is in the middle? Some roles, such as quick response, will be best given to the IRR, so what other tasks migrate upwards or downwards? "The individual soldier must be able to look after their own interests," said Lavers. "If the person is in a contaminated environment they must be able to preserve life. In respect to whether we end up with a dedicated CBRN unit – that is still to be decided. My gut instinct is that it would be a really useful thing, and there would be roles for it, but we have not gone through our analysis process and then through the steering committee, to ensure that we have validated our case. Once that happens then it goes to the higher Capability committees and we go into our capability planning, but that is a long process. One of the things that we need to do as a directorate is look at Army, Navy and Air Force and assign joint capability needs for CWMD, and to do that we have to understand the tactics of the Army, Navy and Air Force and work with their staffs. My objective is to ensure they can operate in a contaminated environment, and our process is about looking across the spectrum of capability and asking whether we are prepared to do that. Over-time analysis will decide whether we need a specialist unit. My gut feeling is that there is a strong role for the reserve units – like the Yeomanry units in the UK – and the re-rolling of the UK Tank Regiment was very interesting as well. We need to keep abreast of all the international changes to inform our CBRN mission."

The CBRN mission, or at least the military part of it, still has a

requirement for people to be able to analyse sensitive detectors. Whether they do that in a protected vehicle, such as a Fuchs or Stryker, or whether that information is handed to them at distance from a UGV, is a source of international debate. It is also germane to the process going on in Australia, as a decision to have protected recon forces is a decision on chassis, logistics and training – which feed back into the number of units needed to recon an area, and the type of troops. Mr Lavers agreed this is all important and is being scrutinised. "It is undergoing the analysis process," he said. "Fuchs and Stryker are at one end of the spectrum where you have man-power, equipment, intensity, etc. One thing that I saw with the Canadians, that I liked the look of, was their DRDC project's 'MATS'. I personally believe that could be the solution we need."

"In terms of UAVS and UGVs, you really need to be thinking about them and ask how can you reduce the risk to the individual? One of the ways is to take the individual out of the equation. There could be a role for a Fuchs, but equally there is one for the UGVs, and it will only be with the right level of analysis and wargaming we will find that capability we could draw on. A lot of the lessons of how we will go forward will be driven by our Steering Committee, so when we make that decision it will be based on a need, rather than opening a magazine and saying "That is a nice piece of equipment!"

The role and usage of a UGV is hitting at the CBRN Directorate's sweet spot, embedded as it is within the number one user of UGVs on the battlefield – bomb techs. "It is a key area of the task force – we benefit from linkages into the intelligence domain which also helps us in this context – but also areas such as training and equipment," said Lavers. "There is a lot of work going on in that area – CBRN sensors are just more sensors, and a lot of the unmanned systems are about

providing a whole system, multi sensors and cameras. The fact that you can have a vehicle that can roll out in front of a convoy from a forward operating base and provide sensing and security – giving you a warning either autonomously or by remote – is hugely important. The CBRN Directorate allows us to focus on the CBRN mission and not to forget it! If we do forget it we end up with a system that is extraordinarily expensive, or the other extreme is we get to a place where someone thinks they can save a little bit of money by designing CBRN out of a standard piece of equipment. One of our goals is monitoring our current and future capability needs, and looking across the Defence Capability Plan at the individual projects across the capability spectrum and making sure they are CBRN compliant and not making mistakes."

There are clearly big things afoot in Australia at the moment and, while nascent, there is the budget there to make sure they are not just pipe dreams. As Dave Lavers pointed out, the most important thing is to ensure CBRN has top cover – that it does not find itself way out on the relevance limb, and the CIED Taskforce will help with that. Australia, and Australian citizens, do face a threat from an increasingly radicalised fundamentalism as the Bali and recent Jakarta hotel bombings show, and there is no doubt CBRN weapons will continue to be an attractive device for the disaffected. In addition to this, there will be a range of non-conventional scenarios, from bomb-making factories to clandestine drug labs, that will also be encountered on operations, and a range of forces, from SF to conventional, will be needed to counter these. While there might be a shortage of detail currently, the next big event on the Australian CBRN calendar will be the Land Warfare Conference in Brisbane in October 2010, and we wait with interest to see what groundwork will have been laid by then.