

Leader

State of the world

Your receipt of this magazine will mark the third anniversary of Falcon Communications, publishers of *CBRNe World*, and since the summer has been oh, so quiet, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on what has happened during these years. Since some of you will be new to the magazine – we turn over about ten per cent of our readers each year as jobs and posts get replaced (not including new readers) – it is probably worth starting with a little corporate history.

CBRNe World was formed after myself and David Levitt failed in our attempt to buy the previous magazine I had started, *NBC International*, from its publisher in 2006. We wanted to create a magazine that would be truly global in reach and content, that covered not only the CBRN threat but also the burgeoning IED threat. We decided we didn't want to be CBRNE, which was then seen as an American phrase (being very new in parlance) and as such had a very definite meaning. Instead we coined CBRNe – to bring together the CBRN and counter-IED (as opposed to some of the other EOD work such as de-mining, airdropped munitions, etc. As far as we – and others – are aware, this use in September 2006 of the phrase CBRNe was the first, yet since that day it has spread and become interchangeable with CBRNE – and has stopped the latter phrase being uniquely linked to US military doctrine.

Yet if we were to launch the magazine today, would it still bear the same name? While IEDs are still a major threat to coalition operations, and your local city centre, have the two fields of C-IED and C-WMD become close enough to warrant the 'CBRNe' phrase and focus? There certainly has not been a Huntington-style clash of doctrinal civilisations; we have not seen a conflict where one has become the victor. Instead, there has been a proximity – a twinning of towns, if you like – where experience and skills have been shared but the two have remained distinct. 20th Support Command is still, perhaps, the biggest example of this, but there are others. The Singapore armed forces have CBRE, and Australia (as discussed on p26) is cohabiting C-IED and C-WMD in the same committee, yet we are not seeing the titanic crash that some expect.

Another change is the mix of our readership. In 2006 – much as in 2003, when we started *NBC International* – there was still a dominance of the military in this field, but this has shifted dramatically. While many civilian organisations are testing – and in many cases, with the credit crunch, are now re-testing – ways and means of doing things, the military has been seen to be slower and more ponderous in change. Some militaries, such as the French, have moved forward, other have gone backwards, such as the British (and dare they go back any further?), while others have made moderate progress or stayed the same – the US, Germany, Czech Republic. While the latter three have the largest forces, and therefore will always change the slowest, many of the new Nato nations from which we were expecting a lot have yet to deliver. Meanwhile, the civilian forces move forward in national fits and starts; a great deal of re-inventing the wheel is done, since they lack

the multi-national framework that Nato or the EDA provides, but many new approaches are found. Neither Interpol, Europol or the EU seem able to provide this crucible for the mixing and evaluation of these approaches, and it would be nice to see some international organisation step forward.

Another phrase that has gained greater usage is the concept of convergence, and one of the roles that typifies this is the counter-narcotics mission, or more particularly the counter-clandestine drug lab mission. Police forces throughout the world are learning that their CBRN skills have direct application here, and this is becoming apparent to those that are also on operation in Iraq or Afghanistan. Again, there are lessons being learned in both fields and while the military does, on occasion, reach out to the civilian forces to learn from them, the same is not true the other way around – while missions in Baltimore or Fallujah might be different, there is a lot of tactical information that chemical boots on both sides would find useful.

Perhaps the biggest change in the past three years will be the drawing down of Federal/government funds as the recession recedes and other priorities emerge. Yet this is not the threat to the sector that it would have been three years ago. Previously it would have been fatal to a young, civil community; now too much has been invested for it ever to go away, and the threat has neither gone away nor materialised in a worse form. Instead, there will be a drawing-down; new tactics, techniques and procedures will be devised for old equipment, which will, in the long-term, result in a better capability.

And the threat? Three years ago we didn't have chlorine IEDs, Polonium 210, a (destroyed) nuclear reactor at Al Kibar, poisoned Afghan schoolgirls, numerous prosecutions for manufacture of ricin, thallium and numerous other examples of smuggling or esoteric deaths. What we have not seen are any major attacks of the 9/11 variety – whether conventional or otherwise – which is most likely a combination of luck, good intelligence and better border control and policy. Are we likely to still be as lucky in the next three years? Well, luck is what you make it – yet numerous US think tanks seem to think our luck is about to run out in a grand fashion. I am not sure that I can agree with their body count (which tends to be alarmist) nor their location (Afghanistan and other deployed locations is still far more likely than the homeland) but we are definitely on a curve. There is a lot of chatter, but there are a small amount of incidents, which are short on assets but high on invention in their usage – which is what we should expect. Unemployment will rise as the tail of the recession sweeps through various industries, which will bring a surge in white powder incidents, and behind all these will be chancers and loners keen to make their pain felt. The old IRA saw of – We need only be lucky once, you need to be lucky all the time – still holds true, but I doubt (and hope I am right) that we will see 'the' event in the next three years – but we will (if we look hard enough) see the seeds of it.