

Gwyn Winfield looks at the work that the Senior Defence Group on Proliferation is doing on outreach

Partners against all odds

It is hard to find an organisation that *isn't* for partnership, yet what is harder to find is an organisation that is for partnership, and that is actually doing something to foster it. The Senior Defence Group on Proliferation (DGP) within Nato is currently one of that rare breed, as their outreach day on 29 April 2009 showed. Again, things like "outreach" days are not uncommon as a

blind for doing any real work on partnership, but this was not – however much I expected it – one of those events. Nato, the DGP and the WMD Centre, had put some real effort into the day, and if nothing else it showed in the number, variety and quality of the delegates there – over 120 delegates from 40 countries, plus staff from the various organisations, plus exercise

participants (approximately 350 people). Nato always expends a great deal of paper poundage on their partners, but the event was clearly a testament to the draw of CBRN to many of these nations, with delegates from Azerbaijan, Ukraine, South Korea and Tunisia joining more familiar CBRN stalwarts such as Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland and the UK.

The aim of the event was to share best practise and looking to improve civil/military co-operation. Admittedly it was a showing from the "haves" to the "have nots" – so the exercise participants were Romanians, Germans, Belgians, French, American, Hungarians, Poles and the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Co-ordination Centre (EARDCC). Not only was the event "New Nato", in that there was a large contingent from the later tranches of Nato countries, but it was also novel in that they showed off their connections with civil forces, with representatives from Nato Civil Emergency Planning (CEP), delegates such as the Czech Fire Service and also exercise participants such as the Belgian Fire Brigade.

The event was effectively a chance to explain that Nato could be coming to a town near you – if there is a major CBRN attack – to utilise the skills of the Multinational CBRN Battalion (MNCBRNBTN) in mitigating the consequences. This was a major theme of the message to the partners – that it is a universal threat that must be faced with combined skills – in the policy, science and research and also consequence management fields.

The DGP exercise was a chance to show off Nato's ability to work with civil forces as much as their military capability

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This was something that the Director of Combating WMD Policy in Nato, Laura Gross, brought out in her comments to the press. "WMD is the principal threat to the alliance; it is our policy to be able to enhance our protection that will allow the Alliance and our partners to be safe," she said. "We are dedicated to counter-proliferation from both state and non-state actors that might seek to harm us."

This support to partners also extends down as far as preparing for recovery after an event. Yet this is an enormously expansive phrase that means something and nothing – everything from hand-holding to fourth-stage decontamination and disposal. Did this mean Nato would be prepared to decontaminate national assets of partner countries to an acceptable standard? Ms Gross dodged the question. "Potential government support will be available to assist in recovery efforts, so across the spectrum of recovery efforts," she said. "This will be as appropriate and within Nato's competencies and what can be provided by the MN CBRN Battalion."

Yet the Battalion has a wide range of capabilities, and combined with the scientific reachback that the JAT possesses there is very little not covered by MNCBRNBTN's competencies. Ms Gross again evaded the question whether this would be a Nato responsibility: "[Fourth-stage decon] would primarily be a national responsibility, but Nato is anticipating being available to provide support as requested and as appropriate. The details of that support would be worked out with the civil authorities and our staff that provide that support." Seemingly, then, the desire is to be able to leave as wide a range of support on the table as possible, should national capabilities be lacking. Whether Nato would ever offer assets for such a long-term, and legally difficult, task is doubtful.

This being "New Nato", slides were in evidence showing the fourth-stage conflict that Nato faces – not state actors but terrorist groups supported by criminal elements and funded by narcotics. Since the Nato Secretary

General announced in September that the Nato mission in Afghanistan would take in counter-narcotics operations, is this an appreciation of the wider ramifications of the fourth-stage conflict? That while the scale of the problem makes Afghanistan unique, other conflicts – such as Kosovo – have been complicated by organised crime and drugs that the local people have either been unwilling, or incapable, of tackling. As has been mentioned in previous editions (See *CBRNe World* Winter 2008 and Spring 2009) there is a role for CBRN troops in counter-narcotics operations, though admittedly a small one, through the discovery and classification of clandestine labs. So is this outreach from DGP embracing Nato's role in counter-narcotics? Ambassador Jacek Bylica, Head of Nato's WMD Centre, also side-stepped the question. "We don't have anyone here competent enough to answer on operations in Afghanistan or the involvement in counter-narcotics, but the linkages that have been highlighted by the presentation are there," he said. "We are afraid of the combination of a terrorist event and the capability in the CBRN field, but the link to drugs is not evident in the event we have organised here."

The event itself was very well run and was an outstanding example of some of the strengths of the individual countries – especially the Germans, who provided about 60 per cent of the personnel – as well as the MNCBRNBTN. The day started with briefings on the JAT and EARDCC – from which, sadly, press were excluded – and was then split into four separate scenarios, each indicative of the threat that Nato, and partner countries, face and the capability they have to deal with it. The first was perhaps the best example of what the day was about: partnership that spans national and governmental boundaries. It was a truck incident, where terrorists had stolen a truck suspected of carrying CBRN agents and crashed it. Its first respond was the (Belgian) Fire Brigade that dealt with the fire from the crashed vehicle. Upon putting the fire

out, their initial survey suggested there might be agents present so they called upon the MNCBRNBTN for assistance, which sent its (Romanian) NBC Recce vehicle. After a detailed survey they called the (German) Sampling, Identification of Biological, Chemical and Radiological Agents (SIBCRa) team, that came with more sensitive equipment and their lightweight mobile lab to do confirmatory identification and analysis. Following this was a demonstration of the French Sibra team as they analysed a terrorist lab, taking samples and following chain of custody to the transport of the agents through to the German mobile labs where they were again confirmed. Next was the demonstration of the Belgian EOD teams and their SIBCRa teams. The Belgian EOD teams, as has been reported in previous issue of *CBRNe World* (www.cbrneworld.com/pdf/07%20Summer%204.pdf) are something special; when it comes to CBRN there is not a great deal that can be taught to them. Since they have such a long legacy of First World War chemical field munitions, their ability to deal with them is well practiced and they showed how they would deal with a chemical field IED all the way through to leak, seal and package. Equally, the Belgian SIBCRa team is a well-known fixture of the NRF force mix, and their range of equipment and training is also impressive.

The penultimate event was a staple of Nato scenarios – a checkpoint incident – yet this came with the additional bonus of a suicide chemical VBIED. After crashing through the barrier, the device exploded under the hail of Belgian small arms fire, resulting in one friendly casualty. This was the opportunity for the German Medical Service to show their casualty extraction and decontamination skills. While the latter was underway, the German Army were able to use their TEP90 to decontaminate the Medical Services CBRN ambulance. Finally, the *piece de resistance* was the maritime interdiction, where German CBRN troops, with Belgian assistance, took down a terrorist ship laden with



The culmination of the day was the interdiction of a ship using helicopter and riverine assets ©CBRNe World

radiological agents. Utilising Belgian helicopter-borne radiological detectors the squads approached in two ribs – one squad had a short fire fight on board the ship while the other went in pursuit of the fleeing terrorists. After the conventional threat had been neutralised, the French Sampling, Identification of Radiological Agents (SIRA) team went in – all seen through a heavy barrage of seasonal Belgian rain!

So what was new? If you are a seasoned traveller through the European military conferences and exercises you will have seen a lot of this before – TEP90, German CBRN Medical, Romanian Recce, German Special Recon Squads, French SIBCRA, etc. There was some new activity – the “boat” incident, for example – but what was novel was the outreach that Nato had done to make sure different people saw it. As I mentioned above, if you are an aficionado of Nato’s military CBRN events then you will have seen these, but many of the delegates were neither military nor Nato – so for a great number of delegates it presented something new. As such it was a bewildering carnival for the partner countries, with the possible exception of South Korea, they don’t have anything

comparable to the potential that was displayed. Despite, or even because of, this the event was a success – a great advert for Nato’s capability.

Quite what they do with it is the next question, and that is where I have less surety. Clearly it is a good idea to show the capability as a starter to further co-operation and negotiation, but to what CBRN end? Would Nato get involved in a CBRN incident in Azerbaijan? With even the best will in the world, with all the notice to move (don’t get me started on NRF13) and logistics issues, the event would be history before the boots hit the ground. How about mutual research? Many of the ex-Soviet states have functioning legacy facilities with very highly educated people – is there a chance of mutual research? Classification poses a problem, but this can be overcome with political will. Is this the case then?

“We want to increase partnerships at all levels,” answered Ambassador Bylica. “Colonel Henry Neumann [Head of CBRN Defence Capability in the Bundeswehr] mentioned forensics, and nuclear and CBRN forensics generally is a growing field. For a number of reasons, nations are increasing their capabilities in this field, so we are able

to identify where, for example, rad sources come from, or where the chemical used came from – both in terms of organisation and geography. This ability is being researched by a number of allies, but we are not against demonstrating to partners that this work is going on, and this is visible in some of the presentations. If you compare the number of threats in this field, and the scale of them, and look at the capability Nato has been building up, then you see an increase. For example, the equivalent of this event last year was a tabletop exercise at Nato HQ, with a number of participants from partner countries but smaller than this. Now we have the live display, a number of partners invited, and the number of nations participating is also much larger. I want to highlight the tendency for outreach and for learning more – there will always be classification in many countries, and that is normal, but the trend is for inclusiveness and co-operation as the threat is common to us all. It is not Nato against the others, as it used to be; we are all in the same boat together facing common threats. The interest is quite high because of this, and it influences a number of fields such as consequence management.”