



Cutting the mustard

Commandant Yves Dubucq, from the Belgian CBRN School, tells Gwyn Winfield about the new European Defence Agency Incident Commanders course

GW: By the time of publication you will have had your first Incident Commanders (IC) course in Jambes, Belgium. What are the aims and objectives of the course?

YD: For a couple of years the European Defence Agency (EDA) has been working on CBRN and EOD combined missions which, as all experts know, will be a huge problem in the future that we need to prepare for. EDA has created a concept of operations – a policy document for CBRN EOD professionals. We have also developed a number of vignettes preparing for the specific challenge on our sphere – Europe. In November 2008 we organised a tabletop

exercise, the aim of which was to test the three first priority vignettes to see whether we were developing these in the correct direction.

As a result of the exercise it was noted there was a problem with regard to the role of the incident commander, and it was a huge problem. We had specialists from EOD and CBRN at the tabletop, but no one had any idea how to effectively combine both jobs. They organised the solution to the scenario through the understanding of their own job, but they did not consider things like the media. The incident commander oversees all these things; if such an attack occurs, he will have more

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important things to do to control what is happening at the scene. When an IED explodes and people are killed it is a specific EOD job, but if we have a combined threat with a CBRN payload we have to prepare for the worst case – evacuation of the population and the use of a many different teams: civilian teams, police, medics, fire, all the support from different agencies as well as the military coming from different sites and disciplines, such as decon, EOD, force-protection, recce and SIBCRA. To manage all these different teams through one operation they need to be very well prepared.

GW: Does this scenario that you are planning involve an attack while EU forces are on operation?

YD: Absolutely. We are not working on civilian or national problems; we are working in the framework of EU Battlegroup combined operations. Of course, all items can be used for internal programmes in the different countries, but different methods of work, different CONOPS and different teams have to be integrated into national plans. But these are national problems and we don't want to mix national problems with EU problems. So we are working on deployed EU Battlegroup operations.

GW: This makes the scenario harder, as you are not dealing with well-understood national elements. For deployed EU operations you might have French EOD, Slovenian SIBCRA, German decon...

YD: Exactly! This is the problem that I mentioned. So the IC will be responsible for co-ordinating all the different teams. He should know what is deployed, what is at his disposal in terms of labs, HQ, host nation support – that is one side. The other side is he should know what is at his disposal in terms of teams – decon teams, EOD, SIBCRA, etc. He has to know not only which teams are available but also what their capability and limitations are. So this person has to have a comprehensive information system, and that is why we have also developed the Multinational Incident Commanders Tool for this specific role. This tool, or computer program, was

presented to the Threat Team in EDA, who agreed on it and now we are trying to progress a working task to develop it. This would allow an incident commander to control any situation, combining CBRN and EOD elements so he knows which terrain and teams are at his disposal. We are still working on this, and have already reached a very high standard.

GW: While it is a work in progress what is the likely future of this tool? Will you commercialise it with industry, or offer it for free much like HPAC?

YD: Like HPAC. The tool would be developed by EDA, but we have decided to distribute an early version to the participating nations so they can train with it. They will then have to give me feedback on what needs changing, which bits are easy, etc. We will also test it during Exercise Precise Response in Canada next July and, after that, cognisant of the advice from the nations and experts to the Steering Board of the EU, we will propose it be agreed upon. If

it is agreed we will develop it fully with a budget in order to have a fully working tool for every nation. All members of this course will, on completion, have the necessary resources and skills to deliver equivalent training in their own national territory. After the course every student will be certified by the EU, we will receive a package to facilitate them to organise a similar course in their country and will also be given access to the tool.

GW: Will everyone who attends the course be a certificated "train the trainer"? Can they pass certificates on to other people?

YD: Absolutely.

GW: But this raises the problem of which school can teach it – EOD or CBRN? This becomes a joint skill beyond the remit of joint schools!

YD: I agree, but it is not a problem of the school but of the teacher. We organise the course at the school in Jambes, this course is set up for IC at the highest level; it doesn't matter



Being an Incident Commander also means being able to deal with people who don't take orders... ©CBRNe World

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whether they are EOD or CBRN guys, they have to think outside of their mission set as their traditional role might actually be rather short. For example, if the person responsible is a SIBCRA team member – and in most operations SIBCRA is not involved – does this mean he cannot be an incident commander? Not at all. As an extreme example, if an EOD guy is an IC and he only thinks about it as an EOD problem, does that mean, if there is an explosion and the whole team is killed, that he has nothing more to do with the mission? No. After that there would be the problem of CBRN, a threat he needs to foresee in terms of the population, mapping the plume, providing medical attention, etc. So it is not a CBRN or EOD problem – it is a CBRN EOD problem and they need to organise everything on and off scene. After the course the student should be able to: outline the threat and the capabilities needed to respond to an incident; define the options of improvised devices containing CBR materials; develop an ops plan and order of battle for responding to the incident; outline strategic and operational challenges; command all scene operations during the response; and co-ordinate a training course within his own nation. To aid him in all that, he has access to the Multinational Incident Commanders Tool.

GW: Three little questions that lead to a larger one: how long is the course; how many people are going to take it; and what is the percentage you are expecting to fail? You are asking a lot from individuals – EOD guys, for example, don't like talking to the press, and you are asking them to do media management!

YD: You are right, but you are talking about an "EOD guy". Whether they are CBRN or EOD, the first thing I will tell all of them – and we have 37 participants from ten nations – is forget your job and background. You are not CBRN or EOD – you are an incident commander. You need to leave everything else behind. They get a lot of pre-reading – all concepts, policy and paperwork from the EU – and they have



*The IC will have to work with multinational military and civilian forces
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to read it all to be at the right level of EU operations. They will have a lot of audio Powerpoint to provide specific preparation courses, to ensure that they do not think as EOD or CBRN. So they should talk to the press, because they are not attached to an EOD programme; they now have a mission to speak to the press.

GW: Is it going to be the case that everybody passes, but some people pass better than others because it is politically dangerous to fail people, as happens with other Nato courses? People's lives will depend on this qualification...

YD: There will be a pass and a fail. We will have certified operators. If we have someone on the course who is not able to act as an incident commander should, and we give him a certificate, then we have failed – we have not reached our objective, which is to create a high level incident commander. I will be sorry for him – I am sure he will be a nice guy – but he will not receive a certificate.

GW: What you are teaching is a highly specialised skill and very new, so who certifies and supervises the course and says it is fit for purpose?

YD: The Project Team in the EU is the best in the world for this kind of operation, so we are developing this in collaboration with all nations and. Hot Zone Solutions, who have been contracted to develop the course. We have been working on this for eight years, helped by people who have been in touch with this specific area – from the OPCW, etc. It will be the pilot course, so it might be that we will try and improve the course later. But it is moving from nothing to something: it is a big step. We have guest speakers that have a huge range of experience – people who have acted during the London bombing, the Litvinenko case and the Iraq chlorine problem. It is not just Commander Dubuq, Frank Kamper or Jim Blackburn (from the EDA) who are talking about it; it is people from outside who have experience in this area and will discuss it with the participants.