

James Milnes argues that ignorance is no excuse when it comes to terrorist CBRN attacks, and calls on governments and private companies to ensure personnel are properly trained to respond to such threats

# TRAINING FOR CBRN

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For many years not enough investment has been made in CBRN training and capability in order to counter the threats that the UK, as a nation, faces. Alongside the threat of international terrorism, the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threat ranks as number one in the Tier-1 list of threats within the UK National Security Strategy. Against a backdrop of global recession and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the lack of will to invest in CBRN training has left the UK with a significant capability shortfall.

CBRN training and awareness is not only a governmental issue but one that should be of significant concern to the corporate world too. The professionalism and expertise of the UK's dedicated CBRN units is unquestionable, but the wider ability of the nation to respond to, mitigate and recover from a CBRN event remains in question. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) recently reported that last remaining 'declared' stockpile of Syria's Chemical Weapons had been shipped for destruction overseas. But they stopped short of pronouncing Syria free of all Chemical Weapons and said that verification work was not complete. Coupled with unknown quantities buried in the Iraqi desert and the rising jihadist movements, supported by UK born and bred extremists, it is becoming more apparent that it is not a question of "if" but rather "when" we will face a CBRN Event in the UK. Investment in CBRN training and preparedness is therefore essential.

The security climate we face in the modern era is complex and confusing on all levels. Who or what is the threat? Where does the threat emanate from? What can be done to mitigate the threat? In his book "The Utility Of Force", General Sir Rupert Smith coined the term "War amongst the people". War amongst the people is fast becoming the "new norm", and the global trend is now clear: organisations that we label as terrorists are in

fact the proponents of modern warfare. The challenge we now face is how to prepare ourselves at home. The "battlefield" is becoming the global stage, and battle-hardened and experienced fighters will import their skills and experience from conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and Russia (to name but a few) to the streets of their home nations. The civilian emergency services, first responders and security staffs (governmental and corporate) therefore become the front line in the defence against this modern warfighter.

Intelligence reports continue to identify that terror organisations aspire to mass-casualty events. The sustained and focused efforts of the security services have constrained and disrupted the terror networks, forcing their members to explore more unconventional tactics. Terror groups have stated an aspiration to develop unconventional (CBRN) capabilities. They have a long-held desire to maximise the impact of their attacks through the use of such weapons. With the advent of DIY bio-terrorism and "science for sale" (from the scientists of failed and failing states) the once highly-controlled experiments and CBRN weapon development programmes are now being conducted in garden sheds, attics and front rooms of houses within our communities.

Due to the fractured nature of terror groups, many terrorist leaders have instructed followers in the West to conduct attacks without training or direction from the established organisations. These "lone wolves" are inherently unstable, unpredictable and their plots very difficult to detect and mitigate. It is considered that these agile and less restrained groups are likely to deploy such a capability to achieve greater effect (in terms of casualties, economic damage and propaganda value) within the UK rather than in a theatre of conflict.

Within the UK, an uplift in investment is starting to be made in the training and preparedness of both



## “It is not a question of ‘if’ but rather ‘when’ we will face a CBRN event in the UK”

military and emergency services to deal with the myriad of threats that the CBRN spectrum offers. The very nature of the threat is such that equipment, training and support capabilities come with a hefty price tag. But, when compared with the potential financial and political impact of a successful attack, the price paid is well worth the investment. Typically, specialist units such as hazardous area response teams (HART), dedicated police CBRN response units, fire and rescue hazmat teams and military specialist CBRN target reconnaissance and sampling and identification of biological, chemical and radiological agents (SIBCRA) capabilities are given a wide range of training. This includes specialist tactics, techniques and procedures, personal protective equipment, gas-tight suits, breathing apparatus, specialist detection and monitoring equipment, decontamination, specialist vehicles and command and control. Additionally, each specialisation has its own niche capabilities allowing them to conduct their tasks. For example, HART units have specialist clinical CBRN training to care for patients in the hot zone, while the military teams undergo hostile environment training

for operations both in the UK and overseas. In addition to the “boots on the ground” capability, the chain of command undergoes CBRN awareness and advisor training to allow them to support the operational capability while also providing top-level briefings and advice to government.

All training is dynamic and as realistic as possible to ensure operators and advisors have the capacity to cope with the highly pressured environments they may well face. Without robust, well-designed and validated training, real-world CBRN events could rapidly spiral out of control causing widespread contamination and mass-casualty issues. Throughout the UK, regular exercises test the ability of the emergency services to respond to and mitigate CBRN events. Exercises cover events from immediate response in the hot zone through to hospital procedures and decontamination of the target site and other affected areas. The Ex ARDEN exercise, held in Birmingham during May 2013, covered a variety of conditions and challenges related to CBRN threats, and was conducted by actual end-users in a highly international composition and realistic environment.

Global events are stark reminders that the threat remains as prevalent as ever. The past 12 months have already seen the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Ebola outbreak in Africa, the growing global impact of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus and an incident in which Ricin was found in an apartment block in Ohio. All of these events have occurred over the past few months, and that is not to mention the everyday threats we face from accidents or releases other than attack (ROTA) events, such as the nitric acid fire in Leicestershire. As this article goes to press, the growing unrest in Iraq has the British foreign secretary raising his concerns about the number of British linked fighters

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supporting the most violent terror group in the Middle East – The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – and the threat they pose should they return to UK shores. The Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner has stated that Britain will face the consequences of Syria related terrorism for many, many, many years to come.

While the government, civilian responders and the military are already engaged in preparations and planning for CBRN events, it is also incumbent upon the corporate world, local communities and individuals to help shape their understanding and preparedness for such events. This is where CBRN consultancy and training companies, who have operational, doctrinal and real-world experience, can provide the CBRN expertise to support preparedness, planning and training. Outside of the government, civil response agencies and military, the CBRN threat – the top ranking threat to UK security – is one of the least understood and most ignored. This could be due to a perceived lack of threat, or it could be due to lack of information and therefore ignorance of the threat.

There are significant consequences for establishments to bear post-incident, not just in terms of financial losses but also in terms of loss of reputation and inability to function as a business. In the extreme cases, senior leadership could face significant insurance claims and potential corporate manslaughter charges for its actions or inactions. Ignorance is bliss – but then again, ignorance is no excuse. Reputable CBRN training providers can work with senior management and staff to help shape an organisation's resilience and preparedness by providing a portfolio of training and advice services. Surprisingly, due to the specialist nature of CBRN training, there is currently little regulation for CBRN training providers and it is critical, therefore, that the chosen provider has not only theoretical and doctrinal understanding but an operational pedigree in order to translate the theory into practice and ensure compliance with current policies and procedures.

These specialist consultancy companies are also involved in European-wide projects to support a strategic

approach to CBRN policies, incident management, prevention, preparedness and resilience, training, exercises, validation, protection of sensitive or critical infrastructure and equipment procurement/training design and delivery. Specialist CBRN consultants support numerous UK and European CBRN work packages in addition to supporting multi-national companies, the media and educational establishments. The overall aim is to bring member states, organisations and capabilities into line with a cohesive and well-structured management plans and capabilities in order to mitigate the effects of a CBRN event, both terrorist and accidental.

Projects such as Preparedness and Resilience against CBRN Terrorism (Practice), using integrated concepts and equipment, will improve the preparedness and resilience of EU member states and associated countries from an attack by a terrorist group using non-conventional weapons. Project EDEN has also been designed to shorten the time to a response (after an event occurs), improving mass gathering/events security in addition to enhancing the protection of sensitive or critical infrastructures – thus reinforcing technological, societal and psychological resilience of the EU society.

The strategic thinkers and those "in the know" are making great efforts to enhance the CBRN security profile within the UK in line with the threat that is posed by such an event. While this investment is being made by governmental organisations, there is still a huge gap in the planning and management capabilities of the corporate sector, security staffs, local communities and individuals. The threat posed by returning jihadists and DIY CBRN terrorists means that the time is now for senior management and community leaders to have the ability and/or support to "think and make plans like a terrorist while implementing those measures as a victim". Investment in CBRN training – especially awareness among frontline security staff – is essential if the UK, as a nation, is to be prepared for the CBRN challenges that lay ahead. Ignorance is bliss, but then again, ignorance is no excuse.

***CBRN training must be as dynamic and realistic as possible to best prepare operators for the incidents they will face***

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