

# *The Role of the Chemical Corps in the Contemporary Operational Environment*



**Command Sergeant Major  
Patrick Z. Alston**

*In times of war, the Army has always maximized its focus on defeating other nations to achieve its strategic goals. Moreover, it is equally important to remember that the United States must consistently be prepared to counter regional or state-centered threats. Over the last decade, transnational threats (terrorist activity, international crime incidents, drug trafficking, incidents by culturally motivated hate groups) have also become a concern. These nontraditional threats have forced the Chemical Corps to improve staff integration and create better chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) vulnerability analysis products.*

Needless to say, these nontraditional influences have increased the homeland security risk. The US military currently has Field Manual (FM) 3-11.21, *Multiservice Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Aspects of Consequence Management*, as a doctrinal guide for dealing with the increased risk of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) incidents in the United States. According to this manual, “U.S. forces may be required to support civil authorities in domestic or foreign situations/incidents due to the deliberate or unintentional use of NBC weapons or materials.”

---

*To achieve greatness in this support role, the Corps must expand its interaction and training with first-responder personnel and other federal agencies...*

---

The support role of our Chemical Corps is cast as a partnership with the Department of Defense, which acts as the lead federal agency in the event of an NBC incident in the United States. To achieve greatness in this support role, the Corps must expand its interaction and training with first-responder personnel and other federal agencies—the effectiveness of this partnership relies heavily on shared annual training. This involvement would ensure that chemical units are ready to effectively and professionally provide the NBC reconnaissance and decontamination support required by the agencies. To remain relevant in this support role, chemical units must have the resources—time, money, and increased training opportunities with other agencies, including participation in contemporary operational environment (COE)-focused training.

The Chemical Corps must improve the cast of the support role by improving and maximizing training at all levels. *Train. Rehearse. Train. Rehearse.* Every training plan should be balanced regarding traditional and nontraditional threats. For chemical units to remain relevant in this supporting cast, they must first be armed with a vulnerability analysis that puts them on the battlefield in the right place, at the right time, to mitigate and alleviate the threat.

Force protection is the primary reason for the existence of the Chemical Corps as it relates to homeland defense (HLD). The mission of our Corps is to protect the force and the nation from the use of CBRN weapons. And needless to say, that focus has not changed. The keys to the continued success of the Corps in the HLD mission are accurate vulnerability analyses and a meticulous system of support operations. I believe that the Corps has strong ties to the HLD mission that cannot—and will not—be easily broken.