

# Exercise “Poet’s Corner”— A Multinational Effort to Prevent CBRNE Terrorism

By Lieutenant Colonel Vasilli “Bill” Karatzas and Lieutenant Colonel Michael S. Quinn

*Members of the Technical Response Group—which consists of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) law enforcement and military representatives from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia—share techniques and procedures, equipment updates, and scientific advances related to preventing and attributing CBRNE terrorism. Technical Response Group members sponsor biennial capabilities exercises (CAPEXs) on a rotational basis.*

This year, the United Kingdom’s Home Office sponsored the “Poet’s Corner” CAPEX. The event, which was hosted by the United Kingdom Police National Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Centre, was conducted at the national Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, England, 21–26 March 2011. With the participation of more than 100 law enforcement and military CBRNE personnel from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, Exercise Poet’s Corner represented the largest CAPEX to date.

The American, British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand (ABCA) Armies Program was granted permission to send a team of subject matter experts to observe Exercise Poet’s Corner. The ABCA team consisted of representatives from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. The team goal was to observe and report on improvements in national- and coalition-force joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational CBRN sensitive-site exploitation interoperability. Specific objectives were to—

- Observe the execution of Exercise Poet’s Corner and develop lessons learned regarding CBRN operations.
- Inform ABCA armies of future capability developments and improvements in CBRN sensitive-site exploitation.
- Coordinate with other capability groups within the ABCA Armies Program to share the information obtained.

## Methodology

The focus of Exercise Poet’s Corner was on the technical response and forensic collection immediately following a chemical, biological, or radiological incident at an event of interest such as the Olympics, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup, or a political inauguration. The CAPEX provided an opportunity for participants to—

- Detect the presence of a hazard.
- Defeat a hazard.

- Create a permissive working area.
- Enable fast forensic collection.
- Allow immediate after action reporting.
- Evaluate team performance.

The exercise was comprised of three scenarios, with representatives of participating nations rotating through each



**A team member renders-safe a chemical dispersion device.**



**A team member prepares to x-ray a radiological device.**

scenario independently of the other nations. Therefore, each nation had the opportunity to observe the equipment, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) of the other nations. Participating teams were allowed 6.5 hours to complete each of the three scenarios, and national umpires and evaluators provided country-specific injections and arbitration as required.

### **Scenario Descriptions**

Exercise Poet's Corner consisted of the following three scenarios:

- **Biological.** Three days before a scheduled press conference for a major sporting event, law enforcement personnel received reports indicating that a terrorist cell may have obtained unrestricted access to a major laboratory. Two days before the press conference, two custodial cleaners who were employed by a major laboratory became ill and were hospitalized. Medical examination confirmed that the custodians had been exposed to anthrax; one of them subsequently died. On the day of the press conference, responders were dispatched to the laboratory, where they were required to gain access, locate the anthrax source, render-safe the source device, and collect intelligence and forensic evidence. Intelligence gathered from the laboratory indicated a planned attack at the press conference location within several hours. Under this time constraint, responders were required to travel to the venue of the press conference, gain access, locate and render-safe an explosive biological device, and collect forensic evidence. An anthrax simulant was used to provide positive laboratory readings for the scenario.
- **Chemical.** Two terrorists onboard a train were transporting chemical devices in two separate passenger cars when one of the devices broke. The chemical agent was released, and everyone in that passenger car (including the terrorist) was killed. The train stopped in a remote area, and the remaining passengers were evacuated. But upon his departure, the second terrorist (in the second passenger car) left the second chemical device in a backpack on the train. Responders were required to gain access to the car, locate and render-safe the device, identify the suspected agent, and collect forensic evidence. Simulants were used to provide positive detector readings.
- **Radiological.** While attempting to construct a “dirty” bomb, terrorists accidentally caused a gas explosion that resulted in the partial collapse of the multistory building where the attempt at bomb construction was taking place. First responders detected a radiological source

and alerted police. CBRN responders were required to locate and identify the source of radiation, render-safe the improvised explosive device, and collect forensic evidence.

### Observations

The ABCA team made the following observations with regard to Exercise Poet's Corner:

- **Equipment.** National police and military representatives from all participating nations used the same or similar pieces of commercial- and military-specification detection and identification equipment. The most commonly used equipment included the HazMatID™, HAPSITE® (Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry), AP2Ce chemical war agent detector, improved chemical agent monitor (ICAM), and MultiRAE® gas detector. All teams also used essentially equivalent types of individual protective equipment (ranging from national military versions of chemical-protective overgarments to Level B Tyvek® suits with corresponding hand protection and footwear) during the exercise. The S10 protective mask (or variant) was the most common air-purifying respirator to be used by teams other than those of the United States.
- **Mission command.** National police served in the lead role for all scenarios; all other agencies served in supporting roles. While overall site control was always maintained by the police, area control was sometimes ceded to the supporting agencies for certain mission-specific explosive ordnance disposal functions. Teams from the United States, Canada, and Australia, used similar incident command structures to conduct site operations. The team from the United Kingdom used an incident command structure that, in principle, was similar to those of the other teams; however, there were enough differences in national procedures and terminology that interoperability would have proved challenging.

- **TTP.** Teams from all countries approached each scenario using similar TTP for—
  - Establishing control, structures, organization, and layout.
  - Determining primacy of incident law enforcement command.
  - Performing search and incident operations.
  - Collecting evidence and forensics.
  - Integrating scientific advisers and subject matter experts.
  - Conducting decontamination operations.

### Conclusions

Exercise Poet's Corner was a Technical Response Group CAPEX that demonstrated success in the sharing of scientific advancements, equipment updates, and TTP among participating nations. Technical Response Group members conducted the exploitation of CBRNE terrorism events with very few differences.<sup>1</sup> The use of similar equipment and TTP among the various nations not only strengthens confidence, but also sets the stage for potential international interoperability. 

#### Endnote:

<sup>1</sup>Differences were based on national policies and laws such as police/military jurisdiction.

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*Lieutenant Colonel Karatzas is a CBRN officer assigned to the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from St. John's University, New York City, New York, and a master's degree in environmental management from Webster University.*

*Lieutenant Colonel Quinn is a CBRN officer assigned to the U.S. Army Nuclear and Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction Agency. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, and a master's degree in health sciences from Touro University, California.*