

NATO Develops NBC Defense Capability

By Lieutenant Colonel Wayne L. Thomas



The development of a multinational chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) battalion is currently underway. The new battalion concept was developed in response to a requirement to fill the gap in the CBRN capability that exists across many North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formations. As its name indicates, the battalion is comprised of units (or subunits) from NATO. The purpose of the battalion is to provide the new NATO high-readiness forces (HRFs) with a viable nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) defense capability.

This initiative was endorsed by NATO defense ministers in June 2002 and approved at the Prague Summit in November of the same year. At the meeting, it was agreed that many NATO nations had an NBC defense shortfall. And given the current weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threat, this capability is a must for providing force protection for the new NATO HRFs.

The CBRN battalion concept is based upon the existing battalion headquarters structure and is augmented by other donor nations to meet the required packages and mission requirements. Additional capabilities to meet specific threats are available on a graduated readiness level. The mission of the battalion (with its attached and assigned subordinate elements) is to rapidly (within five to ten days) provide credible and appropriate NBC defense capability, primarily to deployed NATO joint forces and commands, while maintaining alliance freedom of action in the NBC threat environment. The battalion maintains decontamination and NBC reconnaissance operations and biological detection capabilities in a mobile laboratory capable of supporting identification and confirmation missions. Additionally, the battalion has a joint assessment team to supplement the existing NATO headquarters staff. The battalion can serve as the NBC defense force provider to fulfill NBC unit requirements, including NATO consequence management operations (CBRN events) in NATO response force (NRF) or other NATO operations.

The concept for the CBRN defense battalion is based on a lead nation providing a lion's share of the resources and responsibility (using the existing battalion structure),



CBRN laboratory

with mission-critical assets provided by other NATO nations. The lead nation also has the overall responsibility for commanding the unit, to include implementing and maintaining standing operating procedures, planning and conducting collective training, and maintaining specified deployability readiness. The battalion is trained and certified to standards set by NATO strategic commanders and approved by the mission commander. The plan is to have multiple battalions, selected to serve a fixed period, rotate among the framework of selected lead nations. Identical to the NRF, the multinational battalions will conduct training, evaluation, and certification operations six months before entering the operational standby period. The multinational composition of the CBRN defense battalion dictates a necessity for preplanned integration and interoperability training opportunities during this six-month



Multinational decontamination team training

period. The required end state of the training, exercise, and evaluation periods is a combat-ready force that is capable of providing qualified NBC defense to support the full spectrum of NRF operations. The force will be able to conduct all assigned military and NBC defense missions and supporting tasks.

The force must be evaluated and certified before entering the standby period. Prior to the standby period, the training focus, at a minimum, will be on integration and interoperability training and joint-force, combat support integration training. Additionally, the land component commander (LCC) assigned to the NRF rotation will be designated by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) as being responsible for incorporating the training requirements and exercise programs that prepare the HRF headquarters to perform NRF standby missions as the LCC.

The Czech Republic has the role of the lead nation for the first multinational CBRN battalion rotation; Germany will assume the role for the second rotation (see *Figures 1 and 2*). The lead nations for follow-on rotations are still being negotiated. The unit makeup of the first CBRN battalion shows the uniqueness of the unit. Thirteen countries provide various capabilities, ranging from biological detection assets (from the United Kingdom) to explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) (from Portugal). The multinational CBRN battalion achieved full operating capability (FOC) in July 2004, and the German contingent achieved FOC in December 2004.

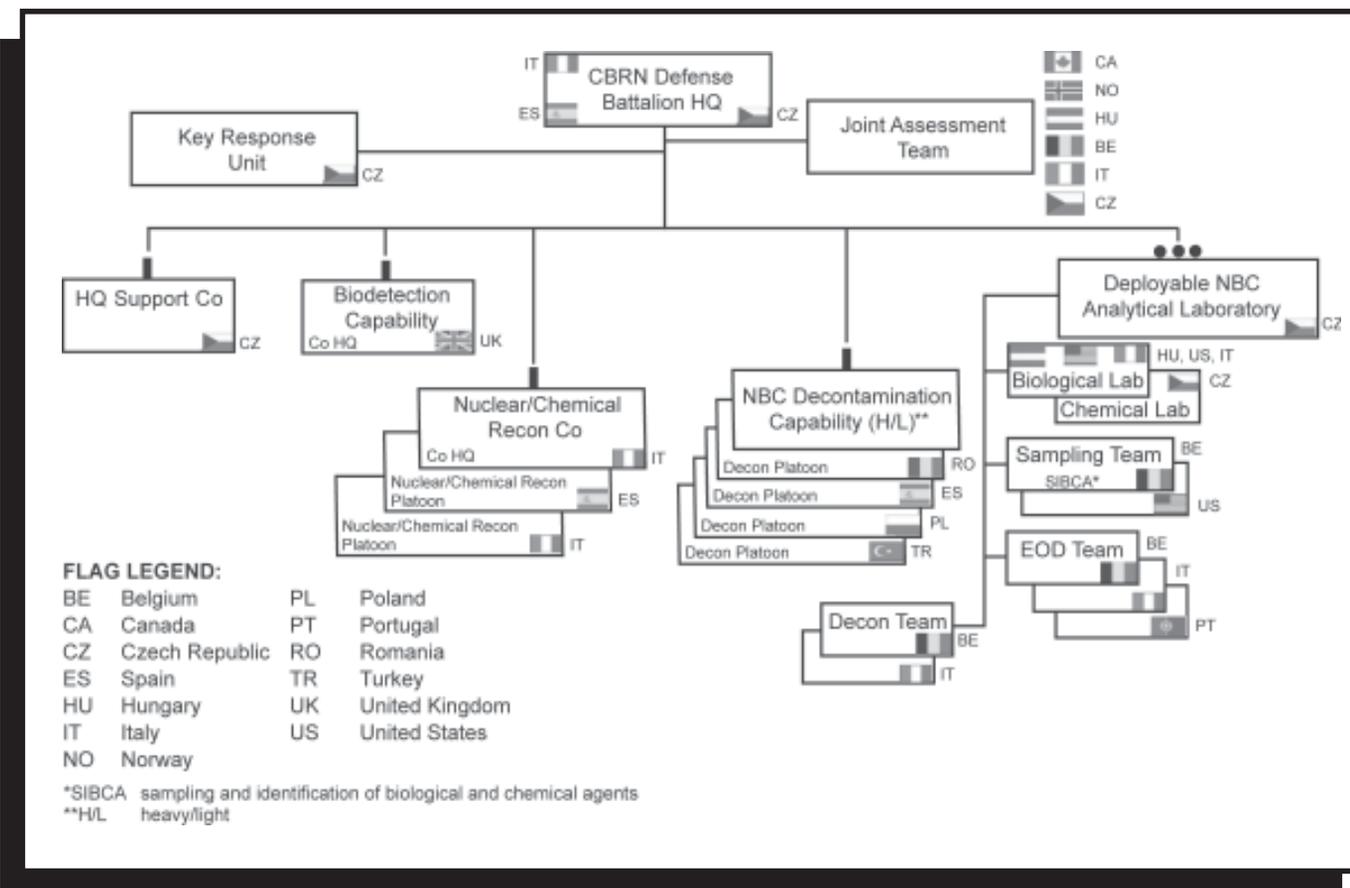


Figure 1. NATO CBRN defense battalion (first rotation)

Many challenges exist in the training and organizational phases of the rotation. These challenges include language barriers, differences in training standards, diversified equipment, and variations in raw decontaminants and chemicals used in detection sets and decontamination operations. And perhaps the greatest challenge is bringing these components together at the right place, at the right time, to meet the NRF deployment timelines and NATO's new strategic focus. These are considerable obstacles for any unit to overcome, especially a multinational unit brought together for six months. These challenges are formidable, but the success of the multinational CBRN defense battalion is critical to NATO's new HRFs. 🇩🇪



Multinational chemical reconnaissance team training

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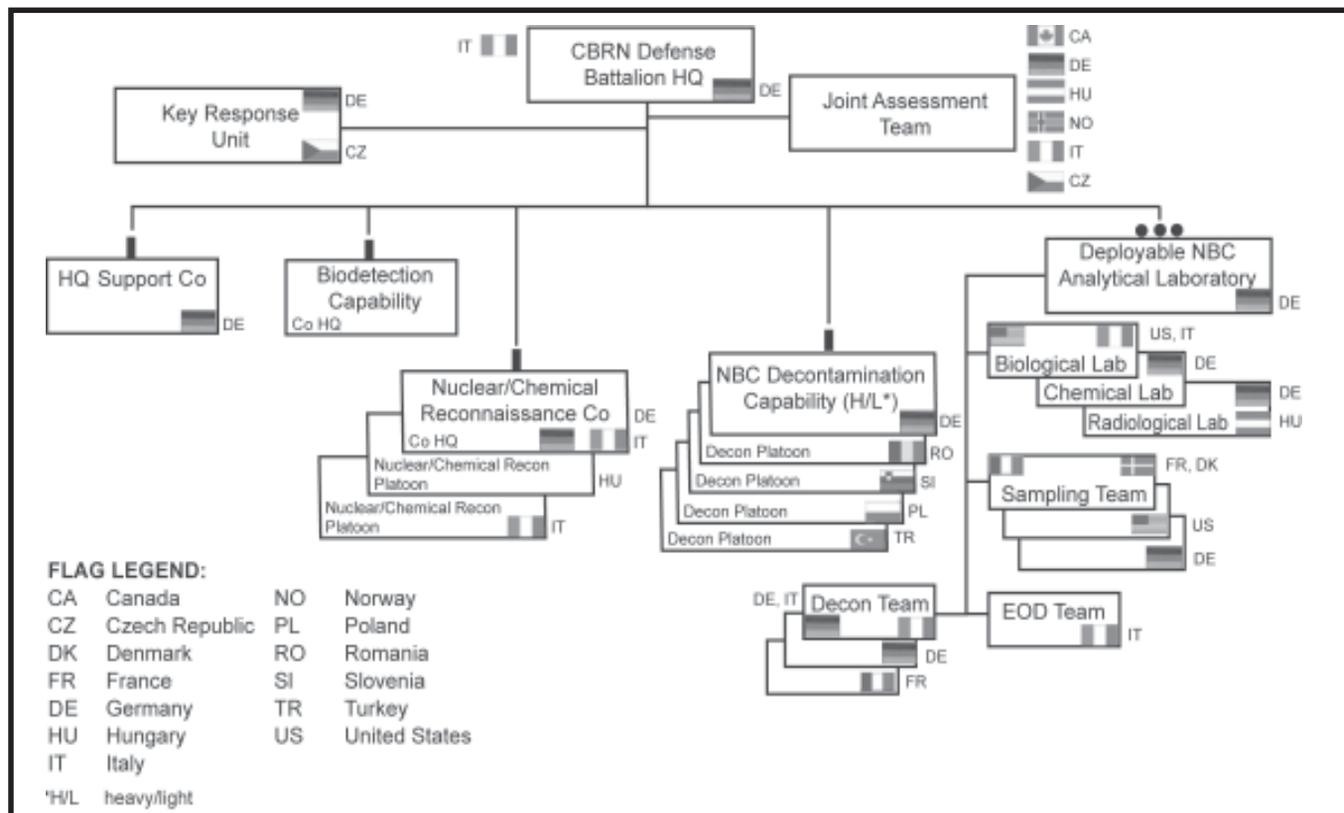


Figure 2. NATO CBRN defense battalion (second rotation)