



# Brigade Headquarters for National Guard Civil Support Teams: A Homeland Security Imperative

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*Public safety organizations, chief administrative officers, state emergency management agencies, and the Department of Homeland Security should develop a regional focus within the emergency responder community...*

—The 9/11 Commission Report<sup>1</sup>

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PHOTO: CST exercise at the Training Ship, State of Maine, Maine Maritime Academy, April 2006. (SFC Chris Hopper, 11th CST (WMD), MEARNG)

**I**N MAY 1998, after a series of presidential decision directives and congressional actions, President Bill Clinton announced the formation of 10 weapons of mass destruction—civil support teams (WMD-CST) within the National Guard.<sup>2</sup> The original 10 teams were located 1 per Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) region to coordinate with federal agencies and synchronize training and operational responses to terrorist incidents region-wide. Since their formation, the number, structure, and missions of these units have evolved. There are now 55 CSTs, 1 in each state and territory except California, which has 2. Each unit has the same table of distribution and allowances and basic mission, but disparities have developed over time in functional organization and some equipment. And as the units have matured, each has developed a new mission focus and skill set suited to its local or state geography and threats. For example, the 2d CST, in New York, developed an ability to work in the urban environment of New York City, while the 93d CST, in Hawaii, cultivated strong maritime contingency skills.

It would be natural to think that these units, with their deeply important state and federal roles, would have their training and operational cycles closely coordinated. Further, it is almost a military truism that there should be robust operational oversight of these functions with a strong interface between the CSTs and the critical federal agencies they will assist in the event of a terrorist incident. And it is logical to assume that given the regional nature of most threats the CSTs might face, there would be a regionally based command structure ensuring that the teams are interoperable and mutually supporting, and that response planning occurred that not only maximized the capabilities of the region's CSTs, but ensured that this important capability was linked with response planning at the regional and federal levels.

This is, unfortunately, not the case. Beyond verbal or other informal agreements between unit commanders and mid-to-lower-level authorities in other government agencies, there is no formal mechanism by which the individual state CSTs coordinate any of their efforts in planning, training, or operational response, and no mechanism to ensure coordination with other agencies in the homeland security arena. Given the critical place these units hold in the realm of homeland security, this situation is potentially very dangerous and must be addressed. Establishment of regionally based CST brigade headquarters is a solution.

## Background

As mentioned above, the first 10 CSTs were located in FEMA regions to provide counterterrorism assistance to regional federal authorities.<sup>3</sup> Now, however,

the 55 CSTs—54 of which are controlled by state or territorial joint forces headquarters (JFHQ)—focus on local and state response capabilities rather than regional ones.<sup>4</sup> Not only do the CSTs focus less on the regional mission, but since civilian first-responders and local authorities have increased their capacity to respond to terrorism, the CSTs are in some instances redundant as a purely local asset.

There are several reasons why CSTs should be formed into brigades with brigade headquarters. For one, the terrorist threat has not changed. Terrorist incidents have repercussions well beyond the local and state level, as attacks in Oklahoma City, New York City, and Washington, D.C. have shown, and CSTs need to be able to respond regionally. For another, because CSTs are not designed to support operations lasting more than 36 hours, large-scale incidents will likely require the deployment of multiple CSTs.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the obvious needs to focus beyond local environs and to conduct relief-in-place during extended operations—and contrary to some central assumptions of military doctrine—there is no specifically designed tactical or operational headquarters above CST level. The JFHQ is not staffed or resourced to perform the day-to-day operations required to command CSTs, and even states with robust directorates of military support (DOMS) lack an intermediate-level CST command capability—the DOMS is a planning and policy coordination staff, not a tactical command group.<sup>6</sup> Currently, there is no formal means to coordinate the efforts of multiple CST units; no specifically organized intermediate-level interface between CSTs and the National Guard Bureau (NGB), U.S. Army North, and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM); and no headquarters to facilitate pre-incident and operational coordination between CSTs and the Department of Justice (DOJ), the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the DHS's subordinate organizations, FEMA and the Coast Guard.

Why is this? The primary cause goes back to the ad hoc, evolutionary nature of CST formation and fielding. Now, however, the CSTs are structurally and doctrinally mature, and initiatives to deploy some or all of them outside the continental U.S. are under consideration.<sup>7</sup> The Army and other federal departments know that the CSTs bring outstanding capabilities to a wide array of homeland security

situations, from terrorist incidents to natural disaster responses to pre-incident planning for special events like national political conventions and international summits. Clearly, the absence of intermediate-level oversight is a significant shortcoming that we must address in order to maximize the CSTs' utility.

## The CST Brigade

In keeping with the original concept of locating CSTs by FEMA region, CST brigade headquarters would provide mission and training oversight of the individual CSTs within each region. For example, the CST brigade for FEMA region one would contain the CSTs from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Locating each brigade headquarters near the FEMA regional office would help link the National Guard's primary homeland security asset with the DHS response to any terrorism-related incidents. Additionally, because the FBI's regional structure parallels FEMA's, a regionally based CST brigade headquarters would greatly increase the crucial interface between regional CSTs and the DOJ should CSTs be deployed. The brigade would work closely with other entities charged with homeland security missions, such as the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency and the U.S. Coast Guard (which has a similar regionally based command structure). Moreover, a regionally oriented brigade would be ideally situated to facilitate Emergency Management Assistance Compact responses throughout its region.

CST commanders are often in the difficult position of having to command and control their units tactically while simultaneously reporting to tactical, operational, and strategic higher headquarters, including state JFHQ, USNORTHCOM, and NGB. Right now, when two or more CSTs arrive at an incident scene, there is no formal mechanism beyond a verbal agreement or memorandum of understanding to determine which CST commander is in charge of combined CST operations. This situation glaringly violates the principle of unity of command and could lead to conflicting SOPs and functions that cause unnecessary confusion and difficulties at a scene.

A brigade headquarters would solve most of these difficulties and provide additional expert personnel to augment any response. The brigade could report to NGB and USNORTHCOM and



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**CST exercise with Maine State Police Bomb Team at the Nevada Test Site, Nevada, July 2007.**

assist with introducing follow-on military units such as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and enhanced conventional weapons response force packages and decontamination, medical, and transportation units.<sup>8</sup> Free of the burdens imposed by temporary arrangements between units based on personal relationships, CST commanders could focus on the tactical operation.

Commanding each CST would be a colonel, assisted by a deputy commander/operations officer (O-5/O-4) and an administrative/logistics officer (O-4/O-3). To ensure that institutional knowledge of state units is maintained in the regional headquarters, only officers and NCOs who successfully served as members of CSTs would make up this small headquarters. The staff would include an intelligence officer (O-3) who would work closely with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, DOJ, state, and other intelligence offices and fusion cells to keep CSTs apprised of developing information in each region. The staff would also contain a command sergeant major (E-9), an operations NCO (E-7), and administrative and logistics NCOs (E-6/E-5).

Personnel should be in a temporary Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) Title 10 (federal active duty) status to allow a multistate contribution without the drain on state AGR resources that a Title 32 (state active duty) status might entail. After assignment, brigade personnel would rotate back to their respective states or to other Title 10 positions. Title 10 status would enhance interaction with the NGB and USNORTHCOM and give the brigade

the freedom to operate without concern for state structures and sensitivities. (Because of its Title 10 status, the brigade would only control CST operations at incidents requiring the deployment of two or more teams.<sup>9</sup>) The state adjutants general (TAGs) and governors would retain control of CSTs for in-state, local responses. Regional TAGs would select and approve personnel to meet special regional concerns and needs. Models for this kind of multistate command already exist in the National Guard's divisions, separate brigades, and Special Forces groups, and in multistate units such as 3-172 Infantry, which has companies in four New England states (and whose commander and staff might come from any one of them).<sup>10</sup>

The CST brigade headquarters would provide training oversight and support, administrative assistance, and direction and augmentation at a terrorist incident scene. It would ensure that CSTs meet NGB standardization goals and coordinate the NGB's rotating operational cycles at the regional level. (An unrealistic system from the start, the operational readiness cycle was originally designed for 10 CSTs; with 55, it has become awkward and impractical.) Regardless of the readiness posture imposed by NGB, state military and civilian leaders are unlikely to allow a crucial state-controlled homeland security asset like a CST to be at a lowered state of readiness. Nor are they likely to rely on units from somewhere else, perhaps several thousand miles away, for counterterrorism support.

The concept of rotational readiness is valid for units in every state and territory, but only when applied regionally. The District of Columbia's 33d CST could, for example, realistically respond in time to a contingency in Virginia or even West Virginia, but not to one in Nevada or Florida. Clearly, it would be more difficult to manage a rotating unit readiness posture in FEMA regions 9 and 10, which include Hawaii and Alaska, or region 2, which includes New York and Puerto Rico. However, each CST brigade headquarters can work with other regional brigades to overcome these problems by adjusting readiness postures and response schedules. Currently, most CSTs are at the highest state of readiness all the time, which degrades morale and their ability to train and puts unnecessary stress on administrative personnel and Soldiers' families.

A brigade headquarters capable of synchronizing the collective and individual training of regional CSTs will make training more effective and less expensive. The headquarters could develop training exercises in which units assist each other, and it could schedule contracted training events such as the CIA University course on the small-scale production of chemical and biological weapons. Many CSTs already cooperate with each other, but unsystematically, usually based on personal relationships between unit commanders. If the CSTs were brigaded, Fifth U.S. Army's regional training teams could also interface with the brigade headquarters and share the burden of external evaluation.<sup>11</sup>

A brigade headquarters could also help units share lessons-learned and tactics, techniques, and procedures; it could direct joint planning for contingencies; and it could coordinate pre-positioned responses to large gatherings or national security special events. In 2004, there was no headquarters responsible for developing or coordinating response plans for the multiple CSTs involved in the 2004 national political conventions. Peer CST commanders with virtually no oversight put the plans together themselves, based on mutual understandings rather than operational directives. To better support the potential response of New York's 2d CST to an incident during the Republican National Convention, 3d CST (Pennsylvania) moved to New Jersey, 1st CST (Massachusetts) relocated to New York state,

and the 11th CST (Maine) moved to Massachusetts to be able to respond to terrorist incidents across New England in 1st CST's absence. Several CSTs provided additional Soldiers and Airmen to augment 2d CST.<sup>12</sup> Again, commanders made these arrangements based on verbal agreements, often with little or no input from any higher headquarters. The creation of CST brigade headquarters would make future response planning and execution doctrinally sound, more effective, and less likely to founder on misunderstandings or external factors beyond unit commanders' control.

## Conclusion

The current lack of an intermediate-level headquarters able to coordinate, synchronize, and oversee CST training, operations, and administration is dangerous and unnecessary. The largely informal arrangements governing the operations and training of WMD-CSTs, arguably the premier response asset for domestic terrorist incidents, are no longer adequate. By relying on dedicated junior unit commanders to sort out vital operational details needed to protect our citizens, we have abrogated our responsibility to provide coherent military leadership and operational oversight for these units. Establishing a robust intermediate-level command structure for our CSTs will rectify many of these shortcomings, and it will improve the CSTs' ability to execute homeland security tasks well into the future. **MR**

## NOTES

1. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 397.

2. Presidential Decision Directive 39 (June 1995); Nunn/Lugar/Domenici Legislation (October 1996); Defense Reform Initiative, Directive #25, "Integrating National Guard and Reserve Component Support for Response to Attacks Using Weapons of Mass Destruction" (January 1998); Presidential Decision Directives 62, 63 (May 1998).

3. Even the CST unit numbering system goes according to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) region, with the first number of the unit designation corresponding to the FEMA region in which it serves.

4. The state JFHQ is the new name for what used to be the State Area Command, or STARC. The state JFHQ is organized and resourced to support the training and mobilization of National Guard units in each state for their federal mission; it has no command and control function. Since 2001, each state has been required to have a joint operations center (JOC), but these are not authorized in current manning documents, nor is there funding to keep additional personnel on orders or to procure equipment for the JOCs. Clearly, for the National Guard, command and control at the state level is problematic at best. In Maine, for example, the Guard is part of the state Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, and the JFHQ includes offices for Veterans Services, Selective Service, and several other entities that have little to do with any day-to-day operational mission. In fact, the National Guard is still struggling with the stated requirement to be an "operational force," even though it is neither funded nor provided the personnel to come close to achieving this status.

5. See Field Manual (FM) 3-11.22, *Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 6 June 2003), 3-42: "To sustain extended operations, a deployed CST must receive additional logistical and personnel augmentation." FM 3-11.22, chapter 3, refers to the civil support team (CST) having the capability to conduct operations for 72 hours, depending on the number of hot-zone entries and the availability of logistical

augmentation. A limited objective experiment on 72-hour operations was performed last year at the Maneuver Support Center. Previous CST exercises established that reinforcement is ideal at the 24-36 hour mark, given the limitations of an 8-man survey team, extended use of decontamination equipment, and federal safety regulations governing hazardous-material operations.

6. Many states have placed their CSTs under the day-to-day supervision of the state directorate of military support or J3 (operations), but some, such as Vermont, have kept their CST under the control of the troop command. The recent mobilization and deployment of key personnel has further reduced the operational oversight abilities of many joint forces headquarters.

7. National Guard Bureau-Directorate of Operations is currently exploring the possibility of seeking a change in the legislation establishing the CSTs in order to allow them to deploy outside the United States. CSTs are by law prevented from operating outside U.S. territory. They are even prohibited from conducting formal coordination and training with authorities in Canada and Mexico.

8. National Guard CERFPs (CBRNE [chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive] enhanced response force packages) are also currently fielded one per FEMA region, and the CST brigade could also have a role in the leadership and management of these units.

9. FM 3-11.22, paragraphs B-7 through B-10.

10. See draft memorandum of agreement governing the 86th Infantry Brigade (Mountain), dated 28 June 2006. This brigade, still in the process of undergoing transformation, contains 3-172 Infantry (Mountain).

11. Fifth U.S. Army is responsible for conducting all biennial CST external evaluations and certifying newly formed teams. Fifth U.S. Army is designated the army force for U.S. Northern Command.

12. As commander of the 11th CST from 2003-2005, the author was part of the planning and decision process to implement these arrangements.