

The Royal Tank Regiment: Back in the CBRN game . Jiesheng Li describes why, but questions remain.

The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review envisioned a clear role for a Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear (CBRN) unit as part of a future high readiness force. The Joint CBRN Regiment would cease to be a joint unit. Instead, the 1st Royal Tank Regiment would transfer all CBRN authority, tasks and equipment to the RAF Regiment's 27 Squadron, formally announced by the Royal Tank Regiment in August 2011.

27 Squadron is backed up by an RAF Reserve Regiment, 2623 (East Anglian). Together, they make up the "Defence CBRN Wing", or 20 Wing RAF Regiment.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with shifting the CBRN role from joint Army-RAF ownership to sole RAF control. Similarly, 1 RTR was slated to merge with 2 RTR under the Army 2020 plan. This transfer out removed what was arguably the key vehicle for CBRN, the Rheinmetall Landsysteme Reconnaissance Fuchs. Angus Robertson MP's House of Commons Written Question to then Defence Equipment Minister Peter Luff in October 2011 provoked the response that the Fuchs had been withdrawn as of August that year, as a direct result of the restructuring. This would mean that, despite having the CBRN Wing, the CBRN capability might be reduced.

Fast forward to 2013/2014. The Royal Tank Regiment became the full RTR in August 2014. The Colonel-in-Chief issued this statement beforehand:

"We have therefore decided that, upon amalgamation, the three armoured squadrons in the Royal Tank Regiment will be known as AJAX, BADGER, and CYCLOPS. Command and Reconnaissance Squadron will be known as DREADNAUGHT, and Headquarters Squadron will be known as EGYPT. Should there be a future CBRN Area Surveillance and Reconnaissance (AS & R) Squadron, it will be known as FALCON....Finally, I should take this opportunity to say something about the formation of the CBRN AS & R squadron. As I write this message, there is a strong possibility that the RTR will be invited to generate an additional squadron to meet this task, over and above our Type 56 Armoured Regiment role... My position throughout has been that the Army and Defence need an AS & R capability, that the RTR has demonstrated the ability to provide it, and that we stand ready to do so again...My one proviso has been to say

that it would not be sensible to double-hat this capability with that of an armoured sub-unit: it needs to be a squadron in its own right. Hopefully, we will know the outcome on this issue within the next few months."

Another House of Commons Written Question, by Nicholas Soames MP, prompted Minister Mark Francois to confirm tantalisingly that the Royal Armoured Corps will include "one independent Regular squadron providing a Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear Area, Survey and Reconnaissance capability."

Subsequently, a British Army news release stated that the new RTR would indeed consist of "three Main Battle Tank squadrons (AJAX, BADGER, CYCLOPS), a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Area Survey and Reconnaissance squadron (FALCON), a Command and Reconnaissance squadron (DREADNAUGHT) and a Support squadron (EGYPT)."

So the CBRN role is back under the British Army's control again. Several questions remain.

First, will this squadron be reintegrated with the RAF CBRN Wing, or remain separate? The news release states that the RTR will be under "part of 1 Armoured Infantry Brigade and 8 Engineer Brigade." We know from the 2013 Army 2020 ORBAT that the RTR will be under 1 Armoured Infantry Brigade. But the report stated "8 Engineer Brigade", a Force Troops Command unit. Could FALCON squadron be under 8 Engineer Brigade, and which unit specifically?

Second, what vehicle(s) will FALCON squadron use? A quick search reveals that the Fuchs vehicle is "back", despite statements to the contrary from then Defence Equipment Minister Peter Luff. The Fuchs vehicle, however, is ageing, and will need a replacement shortly. Perhaps a version of the SCOUT SV/PMRS?

Third, and back to structures: how will FALCON squadron operate? Will it be part of the 'capacity building part of Army 2020? Will it remain under Land Command or come under Joint Forces Command?

These questions await solid answers, as we welcome the RTR back into the CBRN game.

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