



Serbia Eyes Soldier Modernisation

In anticipation of the Serbian government's renewed interest in soldier modernisation, state owned Yugoimport has developed the VB10 ensemble, designed to meet Serbia's soldier modernisation requirements

"The Serbian government have requirements which they established during the 1990s," explained Aleksandar Lijakovic, Head of the Promotion Department at Yugoimport. He continued that recently, the company has looked again at how infantry requirements had developed in recent years, analysing new trends in programmes throughout the world, particular the West.

The Serbian military requirements for the future soldier, explained Lijakovic, consists of a subsystem for survivability, specifically about ballistic armour and NBC protection, advanced cold weather protection systems and also supply systems and weapon systems, based on the M21 assault rifle and integrating further systems on this core."

Lijakovic outlined the broad approach capabilities being investigated; "Integrating the weapon system with C4I systems at the infantry level and integration with new, corner firing systems, laser range finder and sub systems for the integration of target data based on the laser range finder and orientation system up to the higher levels of command in C4I systems. The system also contains new ballistic protection systems with integrated combat and ballistic jacket, together with a new camouflage pattern which we are also developing, based on a digital format. The most important systems however are C4I and opto-electronic systems which are integrated at the level of soldier and their weapons."

Yugoimport is a government state owned

company but with a more complex role than simply as a manufacturer. Lijakovic outlined the firm's three basic missions, "the first is representing our defence industry in the market, the second mission is as C4I developer and the production of complex defence systems as a system integrator, and the third mission is as the importer for Serbian armed forces."

Yugoimport began work on the project in earnest in 2009, undertaking basic trials and developing demonstrators. A squad for the Serbian Army represents eight to ten men, with Yugoimport concentrating on a trials process with an initial three prototype systems.

Lijakovic said, "It is normally intended for infantry squads, particularly special forces and elite forces but also for infantry based on the squad, platoon and company and for integration in modern network centric operations."

For the communications bearer network, Lijakovic explained that Yugoimport had obtained a number of Western designs for the trials, although for night vision devices both overseas and well as domestic solutions were used.

The three systems will equip the squad commander, deputy commander and soldier. Lijakovic said, "We are offering it as our programme and we are expecting this programme to be entered for our armed forces but we are also offering it foreign partners too."

While there are inevitably similarities between the official military requirements and that of Yugoimport,

there are distinct departures. While the Serbian military concentrates on equipping with any future system with the Zastava M21 rifle which fires the 5.56x45mm NATO round and entered Serbian service in 2004, Yugoimport have solutions based on both the M21 and the legacy 7.62x39mm Zastava M70. Lijakovic said, "We are using a highly upgraded M21 but also using the M70. That was our choice, we are combining those two weapons."

Rifles used in the initial trials were used in differing roles. Lijakovic continued, "One has the Laser Range Finder with the ability to get the range to the target and getting the information about soldier position and calculated position of the target to send this data to a higher level of command for fire control systems for example. Another has the ability for corner firing, reflex sight and laser target pointer, and a pocket sized computer to get the information from the commander using the same equipment as the squad commander and a platoon and company commander." ■