Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics

Securing the Olympics: at what price?

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Securing the Olympics: at what price?

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This study considers the ever-increasing preoccupation those countries hosting mega-sports events have with implementing security and counter-terrorism measures and the consequences of this upon the civil liberties of their citizens. From the seminal, and undoubtedly tragic, events of the Munich Olympics in 1972 until the most recent terrorist attack witnessed at a major sporting event – that which marred the close of the Boston marathon held in April 2013 – this piece reflects upon the full extent of the impact that counter-terrorism measures have had upon the activities of wider society, including the creation of an abnormal host environment prior to and during the sporting spectacle, not to mention its legacy long after the event in question has moved on to its next destination. It suggests that there is a very real danger that mega-sports events create a convenient context within which the impositions of security measures, which are only marginally justifiable in the context of the event in question, continue to be unquestioningly implemented.

Introduction

The primary thesis contained within this study evolves from an increasing concern, or at least commentary, in the academic and popular literature about the full extent of the actions of the State, including those appointed to act on its behalf, when seeking to respond to security – read terrorist – concerns around the staging of major sports events. The spectre of terrorism, whether real or imagined, has created a context in which it appears a full raft of security and surveillance techniques and approaches can be deployed in a relatively unquestioning manner, even if examples from other countries, Australia and the USA foremost among these, suggest that the legacy of major sports events is often less about their sporting outcomes and more about how they serve to condition societies to seemingly unrelenting and evermore heightened levels of surveillance.¹

Terrorists have of course targeted the Olympics and other major sporting events in the past, and may well do so in the future because sport presents an ideal platform for such groupings to achieve their primary goals, but history also records that the number of attacks that have taken place during the specific time frame of major sporting events, once again the Olympics offers a very timely example, continues to be remarkably modest and arguably disproportionate to the often frenzied reporting of a supposed threat implying a clear and present danger surrounding such events.

Thus, the argument outlined in this study concerns the full impact of strategies designed to respond to a proportionate threat of terrorism at major sports events, which the evidence suggests creates something of a security legacy to the occlusion of many other idealized outcomes, fewer and fewer of which appear to have anything to do with sport. Therefore, the question arises: are such levels of security and other counter-terrorism measures actually justifiable or do they constitute something of a self-perpetuating myth

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that bears ever-decreasing relevancy to the actual threat of attack as it is factually understood? In outlining the central arguments of this study, it is appropriate to begin, however, with a consideration of the unquestionably very real impact that terrorist attacks, albeit that they remain mercifully few, have had upon the modern history of organized sports events.

**Sport and terrorism**

On 15 April 2013, the finish line of the Boston Marathon was transformed from a site of celebration to one of tragedy. Among the most celebrated days in American sport, the event became one during which people were killed and others, all of whom were entirely innocent bystanders, maimed. A terrorist attack, thought to be the work of two American citizens motivated by an as yet unexplained ideology, reminded the watching public of the vulnerability of sport and how it represents both the softest, yet most impactful of targets for those with terrorist intent. Competitors from more than 100 countries were represented in Boston – participating in the most famous of those marathons staged by the world’s foremost cities, including London and New York – and this guaranteed considerable global impact for the forces of terror. Indeed, it is precisely because sport is thought to be free from the politics of fear and the reach of terrorists that it represents such a favoured target for those holding evil intent, as the annals of modern sport have occasionally reminded its watching public. Rather, sport is considered to be something of a refuge, a place of comfort, for a nation’s people, and thus, dislocating citizens from this sense of tranquillity constitutes a potent and desirable outcome for terrorist cells.2

As such, sport has revealed itself to be a favoured target for otherwise diverse terrorist groupings, inspired by a range of often incoherent ideologies. Major sport events’ global television and media coverage, such as the Olympic Games, World Cup finals and even the Paris–Dakar rally, retain particular terrorism ‘value’, due to their global visibility, worldwide media coverage and symbolic representation.3 The anguished and disorientated images following the terrorist attack in Boston in 2013 merely represent a modern incarnation of those witnessed at the Munich Olympics in 1972, when 11 Israeli athletes and support personnel were murdered by the Palestinian Black September group, and a further extension of those seen in the US city of Atlanta, when just prior to the Summer Olympic Games of 1996, a sole assailant detonated a bomb that killed two people and injured more than 100 others amid scenes that brought the Games to the brink of abandonment.4

That said, while the focus has often been upon the Olympics as a site for terrorist attacks, other sporting events have also been adversely impacted by the forces of evil, often tragically so in some cases. Examples have included a range of attacks claimed by the Basque separatist group Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), which had chosen to routinely disrupt the domestic season of Real Madrid Football Club (FC) in Spain during the early years of the new millennium. The most high-profile example of this activity came when a car bomb exploded outside the club’s Bernabeu stadium in 2002 prior to a European Champions League semi-final, injuring 16 people. Two years later, in 2004, another bomb warning – again thought to be the work of ETA – led to the evacuation of fans, players and officials at another match set to be held at the central Madrid stadium, considered by many to be the sporting embodiment of Castile nationalism within a divided Spain. Also in 2004, there were widely reported concerns in the British media that the home of English club side Manchester United FC, its famed Old Trafford ground, would prove to be the target of Islamic terrorist extremists, principally Al-Qaeda, intent on launching a so-called spectacular assault upon a key cultural vestige of British sporting heritage.5
The aforementioned attack on the Boston marathon was particularly significant as it emerged little more than 6 months after the closing ceremony of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games staged in August 2012, which second only to the Games previously held in Beijing, China in 2008 were considered the most secure in Olympic history. This was partly because Britain retained something of a track record regarding previous intrusions of terrorism into sport, most notably in 1997 when a coded bomb warning from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) brought chaos and panic to the annual steeplechase meeting, the Aintree Grand National. The race, which is ironically favoured by Irish horse racing fans and represents a focal point of the British horse racing calendar, was postponed for 48 hrs only to be eventually run largely as an act of defiance in the face of the unwelcome invasion of terrorism into an otherwise joyous sporting occasion.6

Previously, and again in the context of the history of the modern Olympic Games, events in Munich during the 1972 Olympiad are typically cited as among the most high-profile examples of the interplay of sport and terrorism during the latter part of the twentieth century. What the Munich attack revealed, and it is variably the case across similar global incidents, is the remarkably benign, emotionally bereft response often evidenced by the event’s organizers – in this case the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Initially, through the guise of the then IOC President Avery Brundage, it was almost as though the massacre waged upon the Israeli delegation had not occurred. Nothing, in the mind of Brundage, would stop the onwards march of the Games and any accession to a warped terrorist agenda would, according to the American, represent a triumph of evil over the forces of good.

Prior to 1972, the Olympics had not experienced any significant terrorist disruption. Nevertheless, the murder of the Israeli athletes and members of their support team at Munich irrevocably altered the face of sports event security. Subsequently, at the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games in Canada, no expense was spared on security precautions. The strict security framework developed for the Montreal Olympics, which arose from an appraisal of the shortcomings that blighted Munich, provided a basic ‘route map’ for all subsequent Olympic venue security operations. As such, at every Games staged since the fated 1972 Olympics, security has been both a significant and a highly visible aspect of the event’s staging. In addition to ‘on-site’ protection, the police and security forces of the host nation have routinely sought and duly obtained intelligence from other nations with respect to any possible terrorist risk that might emerge at the Olympics in question. Thus, the transfer of information on possible terrorists suspects and others in and around major sporting events has become broadly accepted and commonplace, indeed unquestionably so in the case of both Games staged in Beijing and London.7

The 9/11 attacks on New York’s World Trade centre served to further heighten security concerns, especially with respect to both the potential threat to American athletes competing abroad and the staging of sports events on American soil. Teams representing the USA in events as diverse as the Ryder Cup golf tournament and international tennis championships have been the subject of close security protection, for this reason, ever since. At the 2002 Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City, the American organizers of the Games instituted two measures then unique to Games security. A 52-mile no-fly zone was imposed around the entire Games site, and specialist marksmen were placed on various elevated positions around the city to protect vulnerable competition venues. Of course, it should be noted that other security infrastructure introduced for the Salt Lake Games was altogether less successful and although implemented amid a blaze of publicity was rarely reported upon during or after the event.8

An often overlooked consequence of the potential threat of terrorist activity at major sporting events has been their impact when persuading potential attendees to refrain from
travelling to such events. Few tourists, keen to attend a seminal sporting tournament, can afford to overlook the potential for disruption when doing so, not to mention concerns around their personal safety and security upon drawing up their travel plans. Thus, risk management has emerged as a key consideration for those staging sport events, not only for safety purposes but also for generating positive legacy outcomes, including those servicing economic, social, environmental and health agendas. The perception of a possible terrorist threat has also been found to influence the actual experiences of those fans who do choose to attend sporting events. There has been an increasing militarization of sport facilities and major events, and sporting spaces are now witness to a level of militarization previously reserved for theatres of war and similar conflict settings. Indeed, such spaces are now defined as a result of their virtual occupation by security functionaries, who prioritize safety outcomes ahead of sporting outcomes, as part of a trend that shows little sign of abating. Thus, although it is undoubtedly true that a balance needs to be struck, the tone of this study affirms a belief that a preoccupation with security has done little to advance the cause of sport and its impact arising from mega-events such as the Olympics.9

The Maccabiah Games are often euphemistically referred to as the ‘Jewish Olympics’, not least as they are staged every 4 years and draw Jewish athletes from around the world to Israel to compete in a range of Olympic-style disciplines. The Maccabiah Games are staged in Jerusalem, itself a city at the heart of a dispute between Israel and Palestine, and the proximity of the tournament to the neighbouring Arab people has been a source of significant unrest over the course of the Games’ history, now dating back some 63 years. Not surprisingly, therefore, threats from a range of terrorist groups, sympathizing with the plight of the Palestinian people in the Middle East, against the Maccabiah Games and its patrons are far from uncommon. The event attracts some 7500 athletes and many thousands of spectators each time it is staged, and these numbers have grown exponentially over the course of the political dispute waged between the two nations. As an indication of the growing security presence at the tournament, in 2005, some 2000 Israeli soldiers were deployed at the competition venues, with larger numbers present during the opening and closing ceremonies. All athletes were assigned a unique identification card, with several built-in security features, including encryption to prevent counterfeiting.

By contrast, prior to the 9/11 attacks in the USA, the level of security present at most North American sporting events remained relatively modest, as the security concerns chiefly cohered around spectator behaviour and their management, such as the prevention of fans from interfering with the event, or entering the stadium holding counterfeit tickets. Yet, all of this changed following the Al-Qaeda attack in 2001, and now security at major US sports stadiums has become one of their defining features. At the 2006 Major League Baseball All Star game held in Pittsburgh, organizers utilized 100 trained bomb detection dogs as a part of an enhanced security programme purposively developed for the event. Prior to this, and referring back the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games (the first Games staged following the September 11th attack), security plans underwent a very detailed re-evaluation and tighter measures were introduced for spectators, athletes, information systems and venues. Overall, the understandable public concern generated by the terrorist attacks in New York resulted in an additional US$70 million spent on Games security, elevating the Salt Lake City security budget to over US$500 million. For this and several other reasons, the Winter Games at Salt Lake City – albeit best remembered for the corruption scandal that marred their return to the USA – passed off without terrorist incident.10
The increasing public debate and proliferation of terrorist attacks across the world have been accompanied by a growing academic interest in measuring the full impact of counter-terrorism strategies upon event organizers and governments within the host country. Reactions to threats of terrorism and the consequences of terrorism acts have increasingly been considered from a range of perspectives, including risk management, mental health concerns (principally the effect of post-traumatic stress disorder) and, as previously highlighted, the impact on peoples’ intention to travel in the light of perceptions concerning the safety of host countries and their overall perceived political and social stability.

Yet, despite this growing discourse on terrorism, the literature on the relationship between sports events and terrorism has often been narrowly focused and concentrated around a limited number of recurring themes, mostly dealing with the impact of technological advances in the field of counter-terrorism upon the sporting experience. Otherwise, and until comparatively recently, remaining work has focused on how the threat of terrorism is understood through the eyes of the media and perceived risks associated with the staging of such events. As a consequence, what has been absent is an arguably long overdue critical reflection on the possible exploitation of sport, primarily its leading events, for the continued and unquestioned advancement of elevated security and surveillance measures on behalf of the State.

**Consequences of Olympic terrorism**

It has been proposed by Falcous and Silk that the desire to host the Olympic Games reflects key characteristics of neoliberalism, which promote the inherently pleasing, aesthetically encouraging sense of place and require the creation of systemic renaissance, creation and management of landscapes to fully realize their inherent value. Of course, the same could be broadly said of other mega-sports events, and there has been no lack of evidence of this in the relentless zeal of otherwise marginalized States, in sporting terms, to secure events such as the FIFA World Cup over recent years. The real costs, as opposed to the perceived benefits, of facilitating these processes, however, are spiralling, some might argue to a point that questions their actual value, accentuated in the main by a spiralling growth in the cost of securing the mega-event in question. What or who they are being secured from and at what price is afforded considerably less attention by an often hyperbolic media but the current situation should be of concern to critical social scientists as sport otherwise runs the risk of becoming a convenient medium through which society becomes increasingly conditioned to being observed and scrutinized or as Sugden’s rather jaundice interpretation of security measures at recent Olympics concludes, ‘Perhaps it is time we got used to the fact that rather than us watching the Games, for the foreseeable future, it is more a case of the Games watching us’. Generally, therefore, what is promoted as the fear of an unpredictable threat of insurgency, giving way to the possibility of mass-casualty terrorism, has inspired what Beck refers to as a ‘protectionist reflex’. Under these terms, a whole range of activities, many of them only ever tangential to the safety and security of the State and its citizens, are facilitated in and around a major sports event. Some of the legislation for instance that has been introduced in countries such as Australia following that country’s hosting of the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games remained operational for some years after such major events had ended.

When hosting major sports events, therefore, where a dominant security (read anti-terrorist) narrative has emerged, the total ‘lockdown’ of the sporting sphere with its array of arenas and stadiums has virtually become the norm. Notwithstanding the fact that the ability to
ensure a safe Games remains central to the very bidding process, the concept of securing
the event allows nations to engage in a virtual ‘arms race’, a security beauty pageant of sorts,
demonstrating to the world just how effective it is in offering peace of mind to its guests and,
by implication, positioning itself as a secure site for a host of other non-sporting pursuits.\textsuperscript{14}
Indeed, the entire field of what Giulianiotti and Klauser refer to as the ‘sport/terrorism couplet’
has in itself become politicized to such a degree that the realm occupied by critical terrorism
studies (CTS), as the two scholars point out, has gained considerable traction.\textsuperscript{15} Those
working within this emerging sub-discipline have been critical of the consequent ready and
uncritical acceptance of official, read State, sources in the reporting and analysis of what we
are often invited to think of as ‘terrorist’ incidents, so that the views of the former appear to
chime almost perfectly with those expressed by sitting Western governments.\textsuperscript{16} In practical
terms, it has become possible now to speak of a ‘surveilant assemblage’, as Haggarty and
Ericson accurately interpret it, so that even the most minor incident, gathering or sign of
resistance, can somehow be made to look like the genesis of something much more sinister,
even terrorist, in nature.\textsuperscript{17} In practical terms what it has meant, as Toohey and Taylor make
clear, is that it has become increasingly more difficult to differentiate the precise purpose of
surveillance and, specifically, the way in which information gathered under the pretext of
surveillance at major sporting events is in turn disseminated not to mention the repercussions
of the same upon the everyday civil liberties of the host peoples.\textsuperscript{18}

Building upon this central argument still further, Lyon suggests that by the close of the
twentieth century the notion of the welfare state was being replaced by the ‘safety state’,
defined by risk management discourses and ensuring that ‘safety’ and ‘security’ would
become privileged outcomes.\textsuperscript{19} Of course, it is entirely correct that major sporting events
are safe and welcoming but there is a danger that sport becomes overwritten by analyses
that are designed to invoke disproportionate levels of risk when in fact no such credible
threat exists and if anything such frenzied reporting actually delivers on some of the stated
aspirations of terrorist groupings, which include stirring up opposition and discontentment
towards the sitting government and disrupting the everyday lives of its citizens.

Of course, as Fussey and Coffee correctly argue, any analysis of terrorism and sport
needs to demonstrate how counter-terrorist strategies hold substantially different meanings
across nationalities. As a further caveat to this overarching assessment, and something that
the commentary in this piece has so far hinted at, remain other arguments concerning what
precisely constitutes terrorism, both in practice and in proximity, and the aspirations of
those engaged in terrorist acts.\textsuperscript{20} What is perhaps noteworthy in this regard is that despite
living in an era of supposed ‘international terrorism’ many of the groups that would
theoretically seek to target major sporting events are located in very specific geopolitical
contexts, and are restricted in their operational capacity by being so. An example in the case
of London 2012 Games was the supposed threat exercised by a collective of Dissident Irish
Republican groupings, led by the so-called Real IRA. In reality, the Real IRA, despite
attempting to launch a sustained campaign in Britain amid a resurgent effort to persuade
Britain to relinquish its hold over the six counties of Northern Ireland and thus to reunify the
Irish people, has never made any meaningful impact in this regard, with a failed rocket
attack on the headquarters of the British intelligence services, MI6, being its most notable
‘achievement’. It simply would not have had the personnel or armoury to carry out an attack
of any significant size or scale at a major event such as the London Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{21} This
reading has particular importance in the light of the ever dominant global models of security
deployed at major events, which only tangentially respond to supposed localized threats and
national dynamics. The precise source of this transnational movement is perhaps surprising
as the actions of many international sporting federations, such as the IOC, Fédération
Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and Union des Associations Européennes de Football, often go unnoticed and yet they constitute the silent hand of ‘policy displacement’ through the (UEFA) stipulations these same bodies lay down to those wishing to host major sporting events. It is they that have partly assisted in sport becoming a disproportionate site of ‘secréticiats’ using sport as a convenient site for the promotion of evermore dominant messages around surveillance and safety.

However, as indicated thus far, in surveying the full extent of terrorist attacks that have surrounded sport it is worthwhile making three key points. First, the diffusion of attacks, that is to say their full reach, and the degree of vulnerability felt or experienced by diverse sub-populations are rarely given adequate coverage in the discourses surrounding counter-terrorism and sport. Second, despite the overriding body of evidence confirming that sport-related terrorist attacks staged outside the time and/or place of the actual event are remarkably and mercifully rare, this reality again receives far less attention across public and policy discussions than it perhaps merits – once more commentary in this realm becomes disproportionate and excitable. Third, most telling, however, is the disconnect between the supposed diverse nature of the terrorist threat, in the context of London 2012 for instance this spanned groups from the Real IRA through to the globally active Al-Qaeda network, contrasted with the seemingly evermore uniform strategies designed to ameliorate them. It raises questions as to the capacity of individual countries to measure the precise nature of the threat that nominally exists against them and respond specifically to it. In the absence of this, there is a real danger that security becomes merely one further aspect of the corporatization of mega-sports events, a one-size fits all response that is more about imagery and less about security.

As suggested for a successful bid to become realized, such as that delivered to the IOC by London in 2005, cities must demonstrate that they can, theoretically at least, hold an event safely and securely, a euphemism that has evolved to essentially mean the prevention of terrorism. The corollary of this has been the creation of what Agamben has referred to as ‘spaces of exception’, the displacement of regular police activity and the apparent comfort offered by huge numbers of visible state military. Indeed, one of the most notable themes of mega-event security strategies has been that of their militarization through both the deployment of military-style security approaches, road blocks, car searches and so forth and the ready use of existing military personnel, such as that witnessed in the week leading up to the London Games in late July 2012 when the British people appeared remarkably at ease with over 3000 troops in full uniform being situated on the streets of the capital city of England. It is worth stating at this point that this broad urban militarism is assisted by a raft of private security firms – or more accurately, the former replaces the latter when it cannot adequately source people to execute its contractual obligations – so that very quickly many thousands of men and women are located in and around major sports events with the expressed aim of providing security yet with little evidence of their coherency or, in some cases, capability. Of course, the defining Olympic Games in this regard were those staged in Los Angeles in 1984 when the entire security programme was organized by the private sector but in fairness these were somewhat different times and the Los Angeles Games remain exceptional in Olympic history in many diverse ways.22

Since it has been detailed, the role of private security contractors is significant because it is they that often mediate the global security strategies commonplace across the world, especially in relation to securing major sports events, but it is they too than offer a local narrative – the ‘glocalization’ of security at mega-events, it might be said. This is of course assuming that these same private security firms can fulfil their remit and the failure of G4S ahead of the London Olympics and the subsequent, and one might say, remarkably
expeditious recruitment of the military to replace them, merely underpinned the view of those who argue that when it comes to security only functionaries of the state can be adequately relied upon to offer a unfailing service.

Of course not all security measures are human, or for that matter need any such surveillance technology to be necessarily punitive. Some can serve a positive outcome, such as providing information around crowd control or, in the competitive sphere, to ensure fair and open competition but there has been a willingness to accept that the steady movement in the direction of external surveillance should be viewed with caution. Most notable in this regard was the unprecedented use of Face Recognition CCTV at the Super Bowl final in 2001. Somewhat less widely pronounced is the all too often manifest failure of such systems. Similarly, the 2004 Athens Olympic Games saw the use of a ‘panoptic fortress’ designed to convince the viewing public that the city was safe and secure but again proved little more than a triumph of novelty and complexity over utility.23

Even more significant and perhaps concerning has been the readiness with which countries hosting mega-sports events have considered the reconfiguration of the public, physical environment either temporally – often in an expeditious attempt to reassure the public at large that everything is ‘under control’ – or from an early stage in the event planning cycle. London 2012 provides the reader with a perfect juxtaposition in this regard – the London Bid Book explicitly promised that surveillance and security operations would begin from the construction of every venue and continue right through to the hosting of the Games. Yet, despite this, most headlines in the period immediately prior to the event taking place surrounded plans to locate a number of ‘surface-to-air’ missiles on top of apartment blocks in the streets surrounding the Olympic Park in East London. These and other practices hint at a further blurring of boundaries between military and civilian spheres in which systems, strategies and technologies typically deployed outside the realm of sport are being increasingly utilized within it, accentuating containment and surveillance and ensuring again that these remain dominant paradigms within modern sport event management discourse.

As has been suggested, however, what is perhaps of greater significance in all of this is the extent to which the securitized urban reconfigurations extend beyond the time and place of the event in question. On the face of it a benign example of this, but if anything one that illustrates the degree to which the public at large have become acquiescent to the broader narratives around the hosting of major sports events, surrounds the supposed ‘regeneration’ of host neighbourhoods, which are often thought to be (in a real or imagined sense) suffering from a multitude of deprivations. The subsequent attempted gentrification of such areas brings with it elevated expectations concerning security and safety, presumably from some of those indigenous to the very same area, and these are considerations built into the entire street and eventscape from their inception. As Guilianotti and Klauser accurately surmise,

> for some time after the event has long since left town, the legal framework, a plethora of surveillance paraphilia, urban redevelopment and other defined changes all remain in place, as security-focused measures that structure, frame and film everyday social life.24

It is apparent that critical social scientists, especially those working in the field of sport, have a role to play in contributing to public debates on these issues, especially as many of the outworking of this process remain as yet unclear.

**Defined behaviour**

The corpus of work undertaken by Toohey and colleagues, substantiated lately by Baker around the management of sports events, is significant as it points up the seemingly
ongoing disconnect between what Olympic event organizers (e.g. in the case of the London Games, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games) fear may happen at a mega-sports event and public perceptions of the terrorist threat concerning the same. Consequently, an emerging, and consistent, theme of security around mega-events has been the extensive use of ‘zero tolerance’ style policing approaches and exclusion orders – notably in Sydney (2000) and Beijing (2008). In this case, there is a convergence of strategies designed to effectively sanitize large urban locales with a slightly more robust approach to policing in which certain standards of ‘proper’ behaviour are facilitated although anything that might deviate from this can be subject to physical and/or legal restraint and subsequent sanction. In arguing that State authorities are adept at using the media to depict the behaviours and identities of social ‘undesirables’ as quasi-terrorist in form, Bairner correctly observes that such programmes of action represent little more than an attempt to preserve something akin to ‘conservative social hegemony’ among the masses.

While ostensibly in place to address disorder and ensure safety, the application of these strategies has received criticism from those who see them as restricting the democratic right to protest and interpreted by others as an attempt to achieve little more than safeguard the apparently omnipotent rights of the event’s sponsors. A good example of the latter was the operation of South Africa’s ‘World Cup Courts’ in 2010, which included the infamous case of the female Holland supporters who had the temerity to wear clothing bearing the label of a beer company who were interpreted (by whom it is unclear) to be in competition with one of the key event sponsors. A raft of legislation brought forward around the hosting of the London 2012 Games, some of it all too conveniently forgotten as it was enacted on to the statute books within a year of the city being awarded the event, includes the Olympics Act 2006, specifically Sections 19 and 22, which permitted police to enter private property in order to confiscate unauthorized protest or advertising materials. Likewise, Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, enabling the police to freely stop and search any vehicle or member of the public, could also be liberally deployed, again bringing into sharp contrast the full extent of the State armoury available to effectively control and execute the London Games according to the precise wishes of the organizers and, more accurately, the sitting British coalition government of the day. In Australia, the security preparations for the Sydney Olympic Games also extended to enacting legislation to prevent protests. The fear of civil unrest related specifically to the implementation of the Homebush Bay Operations Act (1999) and Homebush Bay Operations Regulation (1996). Both remained in operation until 31 March 2002 and among other extraordinary measures allowed enforcement officers to use reasonable force to remove people, prevent the distribution of materials and so forth. No specific qualifications were required of the enforcement officers – they were not police personnel or functionaries of the State yet retained this right for some considerable period of time prior to, during and after the Sydney Games.

All of this is important because, in-line with the views of Toohey and others, Atkinson and Young argue that major sporting events have become ‘fabricated zones of risk’. A core component of this thesis is what the authors refer to as ‘a lingering media construction of the sports mega-event as an imagined target of terrorism’ suggesting that the media plays a critical role in the hyperbolizing risk and danger around major events. No one is saying that major sporting events have not in the past and will not in the future attract the attention of terrorists or that such events should not be properly secured to ensure individuals or groups that might wish to harm others or disrupt activities should not be identified and apprehended where it is appropriate to do so. What is important, however, are for critical social scientists, in this case those dealing with sport, to pause and consider the full
implications of hosting major sports events and many of the non-sporting outcomes that flow from them.

Schimmel’s recent critical examination of the intersections between the National Football League’s (NFL) security practices and the counter-terrorism agenda of US Homeland’s security has led, she argues, to the inadvertent militarization of football fans in ways not previously considered. Tellingly, this study concludes with Schimmel informing the reader that as a consequence of the full effects of the interrelationship between these two agencies ‘At the present historical moment… I cannot attend an NFL event or be present in the urban location that the NFL is “protecting”, without in effect, being on active duty in the US war on terror.’ Notwithstanding this perhaps exaggerated personal contribution to US Domestic and Foreign policy the sentiments are clear: sport has become a key site for the mediation, promotion and consolidation of messages around security and surveillance in a manner that all of us should take proper cognisance of now and, increasingly so it appears, in the future.30

Conclusion

Sports events, especially those of a high-profile, global form such as the FIFA World Cup but especially the Olympic Games, have increasingly become the target of terrorist groupings. In fact, the threat of terrorism is arguably close to eclipsing the perceived benefits – the much vaunted legacy outcomes – of hosting the Olympics, including those of a sporting nature. In short, the question arises as to what really is the point staging a concerted 7–8-year campaign to host the Olympic Games if they subsequently become engulfed in a security stranglehold designed to stave off attack from a largely ill-defined and variable opponent? There are many examples of how terrorism has adversely impacted upon domestic and transnational sports events, some of which being of an extremely tragic nature. Yet, the core argument in this study, which has utilized research drawn from throughout the sporting world, is that there remains a need to be circumspect about where the unrelenting, and often unquestioning, campaign to secure sport is leading the watching public. Perhaps more pointedly, it behoves critical social scientists, principally those working in the field of sport, to remain vigilant to the possible exploitation of sport by those who see benefit in ever-increasing levels of surveillance and monitoring. Perhaps this is the price to pay for hosting such major events in the first place but if this is the case then, amid a growing scepticism around the often trumpeted legacy outcomes such events are thought to provide, there might exist even more evidence that, when it comes to making a similar decision in the future, that discretion really is the better part of valour.

Notes

2. Toohey and Taylor, ‘Mega Events, Fear, and Risk’ and Jennings, Foul! The Secret World of FIFA.
5. Palmer, ‘Outside the Imagined Community’.
6. Hassan and O’Kane, ‘Terrorism and the Abnormality of Sport’.
10. Richards, ‘Terrorism, the Olympics and Sport’.
15. Giulianotti and Klauser, ‘Sport Mega-events and “Terrorism”’.
18. Toohey and Taylor, ‘Surveillance and Securitization’.
24. Giulianotti and Klauser, ‘Sport Mega-events and “terrorism”’.
27. Fussey and Coaffee, ‘Balancing Local and Global Security Leitmotifs’.
28. Toohey and Taylor, ‘Surveillance and Securitization’.
29. Atkinson and Young, ‘Shadowed by the Corpse of War’ and Atkinson and Young, ‘Terror Games’.

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