

# **Terrorism, The Olympics and Sports: Recent Events and Concerns for the Future**

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## **Introduction**

The link between terrorism and sport is not a new development (most dramatically evident at the Olympics of 1972 and 1996). Yet, recent events seem to indicate that sports and sportspeople have become increasingly targeted by terrorists. Examples have included the gun attack in March 2009 in Lahore on the Sri Lankan cricket team, the suicide bomb attack on spectators at a volleyball match in Laki Marwat, North-West Pakistan in January 2010, and the gun attack in Cabinda, Angola on the Togo national football team in the same month. Earlier, in August 2009, the English badminton team withdrew from the World Championships in Hyderabad due to a specific terrorist threat. Given the enormous publicity potential of an attack on the Olympics, the 2012 Games again raises the spectre of the convergence of terrorism and sport.

The following will assess the utility of the Olympics and sports events (and indeed sportspeople) as terrorist targets. Although the Olympics in general itself presents a ‘hardened’ target, given the global audience that is focused on the Games, and the fact that some venues, cities, and transport systems will inevitably be less protected than others, it still represents an alluring target. Indeed, any attack on the UK during Games time would arguably be an attack on the Olympics itself. Beyond the Olympics, the following will consider whether or not the recent spate of terrorist attacks on sports represents part of a developing trend. It will ultimately argue that terrorism has had the most impact on sport (mainly cricket) in South Asia, particularly Pakistan and India, both due to direct attacks on sports targets but also due to other terrorist attacks (such as Mumbai) that have impacted on perceptions of security (or lack of) at sporting venues in these countries. The direct sporting attacks of Lahore and Laki Marwat (and indeed the attack on the Togo football team) were arguably motivated by relatively local agendas and have not since been replicated elsewhere. Nevertheless, given the propensity of Al Qaeda to target high profile and mass casualty targets, and the indiscriminate nature of its violence permitted by its ideological parameters, it would be dangerous to ignore the potential threat that it represents to major sports events and sportspeople in Western countries and elsewhere.

This chapter will begin by briefly assessing what is meant by ‘terrorism’ and how some features of terrorism illuminate the significance of events such as the Olympics for terrorist targeting purposes. Terrorism is communication and the Olympics provides a prime opportunity and illustration of the value of the media in publicising a terrorist organisation’s cause. Before assessing the utility of such events as targets for terrorists, however, the chapter

will provide a brief historical overview as to how in fact the Olympics and sport in general have more broadly been subject to political manipulation, dating back to ancient times when they were exploited to enhance physical strength and military prowess. It will then go on to consider how they have been politically exploited by those using terrorism and what impact this has had on sport, before returning to the Olympic theme in particular by considering the threats that Al Qaeda and dissident Irish republicans pose to London 2012.

### **Features of terrorism and their implications for the Olympics**

Terrorism can be described as a particular method of violence and/or the threat of violence that has been carried out by a wide range of actors (both state and non-state), that often targets civilians, is usually for a political purpose and is usually designed to have a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims. A subset of terrorism is the concept of non-state terrorism which can be described as a particular method of violence and/or the threat of violence that has been carried out by non-state actors in order to coerce a government and its population, that often targets civilians, is usually for a political purpose and is usually designed to have a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims. While states are most certainly culpable as perpetrators of terrorism (whether they have carried out acts of terrorism, have sponsored terrorism or have perpetrated what has often been called ‘state terror’) it is non-state terrorism that states are primarily concerned with in their efforts to defend their homelands.<sup>1</sup> This distinction is important because it allows us to transcend the current debate over the extent, if at all, to which ‘the state’ as perpetrator has been excluded from terrorism studies (and also from definitions of terrorism) (Jackson, 2009). So for the purposes of this chapter the definition of non-state terrorism will be used.

Notwithstanding such distinctions, terrorism seeks to generate a wider impact beyond the immediate victims of an attack. It is about communicating a message, often to a number of target audiences (whether they be a perceived constituency of support, the international community or an adversary) – and it is the desire to transmit a message at the global level and even to capture the world’s attention (as the Black September attack did in 1972) that potentially makes sports events an attractive target.

The Olympic movement, as an international endeavour that seeks to promote peace and harmony, is ideally positioned to appreciate one of the major obstacles to countering terrorism – the inability of the international community to agree a definition of the phenomenon and therefore the degree of difficulty in generating international cooperation against those who would resort to terrorism. Even after the most devastating attack ever to have afflicted the Olympics in Munich 1972 the then Secretary General of the United Nations Kurt Waldheim, in his efforts to encourage member states to agree to the need for ‘measures to prevent terrorist and other forms of violence which endanger or take human lives or jeopardise fundamental freedoms’, was confronted by deep concern from some African and Arab states that those engaged in legitimate national liberation struggles would be classified as terrorists (Wardlaw, 1989:105). Although it seems to be more useful to view terrorism as a

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<sup>1</sup> The exception to this in the Olympic context was the threat posed by North Korea against the Seoul games of 1988

*method*<sup>2</sup>as opposed to focusing on those definitions that are perpetrator based the problem of the subjective nature and use of the term persists to this day.

## Sport as a political and military weapon

Before exploring further the exploitation of the Olympic Games by terrorist groups, it is worth reminding ourselves that the Olympics and sport in general have long been the subject of political exploitation. Despite calls that politics should be left out of sport (perhaps most notably by those who advocated the increase of sporting links with South Africa during apartheid) the fact is that sport has inevitably become prey to political manipulation both in the contemporary world and indeed in ancient times.

‘Sport’ is a shortened form of the original term of ‘disport’, meaning a diversion or an amusement (Brasch, 1986: 1). Apart from the natural desire to compete, the impetus behind sport was also for man to be able to more effectively defend himself and his tribe, to learn to run fast, to jump and to swim. Sporting activities such as archery, judo and karate were invented in order to tackle opponents (*Ibid*:2). The development of sports that required physical strength found much of its origin in the desire to defend against and conquer one’s enemies. Thus chariot racing, boxing and wrestling were inextricably linked to the defence of cities; indeed ‘ultimately, there was only one intent and aim of athletic contests: to feint the stress of battle; to stay sharp and ready for war’ (Spivey, 2004:18). Despite the not uncommon contention that ‘good athletes do not necessarily make good soldiers’, physical strength and traditions of ‘rigorous gymnastic upbringing’, perhaps typified by the Spartans, were linked to military prowess (*ibid*: 27). Miller, referring to the Greek city-states from around 525 BC states that ‘athletics were clearly a tool of ancient political aggrandizement – just as they are today’, with coins used to ‘advertise victories at Olympia and other games’ (Miller, 2004: p. 218).

The intertwinement of military power and Olympic success was illustrated by the entry by Alkibiades of seven chariots at the Olympiad of 416 BC against the backdrop of the Peloponnesian War. In anticipation of an Athenian victory he apparently proclaimed that:

‘The Greeks who had been hoping that our city was exhausted by the war came to think of our power as even greater than it is because of my magnificent embassy at Olympia. I entered seven tethrippa [chariots], a number never before entered by a private citizen, and I came in first, second, and fourth’ (Miller: 221).

Many centuries later the link between sports and the military was also explicitly encouraged by the United States armed forces in the run up to World War I where sports and athletic training were made ‘a central component of military life’ (Pope, 1997: 139). Indeed, sports

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<sup>2</sup> As Leonard Weinberg rightly observed the notion of ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ confuses the goal with the activity (Weinberg 2008, p. 2).

were accepted as ‘essential elements of a soldier’s responsibility’ that ‘made good military sense in developing needed physical endurance’ (*ibid*:144).

Sport has also been used to promote national fervour and nation-building. Italy’s football World Cup triumph in 1938 was seen as uniting the Italian diaspora behind Mussolini’s fascist regime and for generating a communal identity (Martin :2004, p. 1). To this end the regime was credited with regenerating Italian society through sport with particular emphasis on exploiting the mass appeal of football (or ‘calcio’) for political goals (Martin: 2004, p. 15 and 2). The 1936 Olympics in Berlin, which was awarded to the city at least partly to bring Germany back into the international fold after World War 1, provided Adolf Hitler with an opportunity to showcase the Germany that he was moulding and it became an enormous propaganda exercise for nazism (Hilton). Apart from such nation-building the Olympic Games has also been the victim of the turmoil of international politics. They did not take place at all in 1916, 1940 and 1944 because of the two world wars.

The very fact, of course, that athletes are identified with a state is a political statement in itself. Indeed, it was hoped that through the presence of their delegation at the Atlanta Games, Palestinians could use sport as a stepping stone to nationhood (Sanan p. 305). For host nations it is seen as an opportunity to showcase their country to the many thousands of tourists and millions of watchers. It can therefore also, conversely, be used as a political tool to undermine a host country’s attempts to enhance its international profile and, as such, the spectacle has often been subject to the vagaries of the international politics of the time. The context of the Cold War, for example, provided the backdrop against which boycotting the Olympics became a political weapon. The US led boycott of the Moscow games in 1980 (in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) was reciprocated by the Soviet Union when it stayed away from the Los Angeles games of 1984.

Sports have been exploited for other more positive political reasons – as the means to underpin diplomacy in international politics. This was perhaps most evident through the ‘ping-pong’ diplomacy that took place between The United States and China after the American ‘Ping-Pong’ team accepted an invitation to visit China in April 1971. It was followed by the visit of President Nixon to the People’s Republic in 1972. In this case sport had clearly served as a lever to improve relations between the two countries.

Yet, while sports events have been manipulated for a variety of reasons, conversely, ‘all sports have [also] had to take a view on international politics’ (Hill: 1996, p. 34). Hill uses the example of the bridge world championships where Israel and its ‘numerous’ enemies were drawn in separate qualifying pools in the hope that they would not progress far enough to ultimately have to play against each other (*Ibid*). The Gleneagles Declaration of Commonwealth nations in opposition to apartheid discouraged athletes and sportsmen from competing against their South African counterparts. This confirmed their earlier commitment in 1971 to oppose racism and was followed by their Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice in 1979. This is in line with one of the IOC’s fundamental principles of ‘Olympism’ which is: ‘any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the

Olympic Movement.' Hence the suspension of South Africa from the Games in 1970 which explains its absence from 1972-1988 inclusively.

### **The Ancient Games and the 'Ekecheiria'**

Much is made of the peaceful mission of the Olympic Games and how terrorism flies in the face of the very ideals that the Olympics stands for. In ancient times, the many different autonomous and Greek regions laid down their arms to 'enjoy the 'divine peace' associated with the Olympic competitions' in honour of Zeus (Sinn: 2000, 1). Hostilities ceased for a one month period such was the high regard held for the Games which were treated as inviolable. What was known as the *ekecheiria* was 'an indispensable precondition for continuous and undisturbed holding of the Olympic Games' and it was seen not as an arbitrary human institution but as divine law (Lammer, p. 8). This was because 'the area of the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia was declared holy (Greek: *hieros*) and therefore sacrosanct' and anyone breaking these rules would have to fear the revenge of Zeus (Lammer, p. 4). As such, athletes, their coaches and spectators could travel freely to and from Olympia without fear of being attacked or robbed, even if they were travelling through land governed by those against whom their own rulers were at war. Thus, quite in contrast to the Olympics being seen as an opportunity for terrorists to exploit through violence or being cancelled because of war (1940, 1944), the Games in ancient times were highly respected and a truce and temporary respite from wars took place in their honour, though there were exceptions (see below and Lammer pp. 11-12). This did not mean, however, that the Olympics was immune from becoming 'a field of propaganda for the great powers and ... a continuation of war by other means (Lammer, p. 16)'.

Not that the games of the period were entirely exempt from political violence. According to Miller the Nemean Games of 415 BC were removed from Nemea after destruction in the city, though this may not have taken place during the games (Miller: 221). In 364 BC the Eleans attacked the Olympics hosted by the Arkadians, before severe losses forced the former to retreat. Henceforth they labelled the games as an Anolympiad (Non-Olympiad) (Ibid: 222). Later in 235 BC, against a backdrop of political conflict between Argos and Aratos of Sikyon, and after the Nemean Games had been moved to Argos, a rival games was held at Nemea. Aratos, whose decision it was to launch the rival games at Nemea, 'captured and sold into slavery' any athlete he caught travelling through his territory to the games at Argos (Ibid: 222).

Nevertheless, Miller points out that whatever political manoeuvrings took place, including the rare cases of political violence, during the more than a millennium of ancient Greek Olympic Games, the 'games went on'. This, he argues, is in contrast to the past century of modern Olympics where Munich 1972 and three major boycotts (1976-84) seriously threatened the events (although these games did 'go on') and where the games of 1916, 1940 and 1944 did not even take place at all because of the political environment (Miller: 225).

Notwithstanding these subsequent interruptions, one of the core motivations for Baron de Coubertin in reviving the modern Olympic Games towards the end of the nineteenth century was ‘for international understanding and peace’ (Barney: 2007, p.225). The Olympic Charter describes ‘Olympism’ as seeking to ‘create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles’ (IOC Charter: p.11). It states that: ‘The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity’ (IOC Charter: p.11). And some have gone so far as to suggest that ‘Olympism is a philosophy of life which uses sport as a conveyor belt for its ideas’ (Hill: 1996, p. 258). Clearly, any attack, therefore, on the Games flouts these ideals. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the terrorists who have targeted or have aimed to target the Games have done so deliberately and specifically to oppose these values. More accurately, these Olympic aspirations are of relative insignificance compared to the objectives of terrorist organisations and the enormous potential that the Olympics provides in relation to advertising their cause to a vast international audience.

### **Terrorism and the targeting of sports**

To use the non-state definition of terrorism referred to above: it is a particular method of violence and/or the threat of violence carried out by non-state actors in order to coerce a government and its population, that often targets civilians, is usually for a political purpose and is usually designed to have a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims. To reiterate, terrorism is therefore a form of communication that is designed to send a message to a wider audience beyond the immediate victims. The media, including the internet, provides the means through which the message can be delivered while the prestige and popularity of the Olympics provides the stage with its audience of millions. The Olympics is one of the most major global media events of all time and any attack by terrorists is designed to, and almost certainly would, attract unprecedented publicity for the cause of the perpetrators.

George Habash, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was quoted as writing that:

‘a bomb in the White House, a mine in the Vatican, the death of Mao Tse-Tung, an earthquake in Paris could not have echoed through the consciousness of every man in the world like the operation at Munich … The choice of the Olympics, from the purely propagandist viewpoint, was 100 per cent successful. It was like painting the name of Palestine on a mountain that can be seen from the four corners of the earth’ (cited in Taylor, 1993:6).

One of the organisers of the Munich terrorist attack argued that ‘we have to kill their most important and famous people. Since we cannot come close to their statesmen, we have to kill artists and sportsmen’ (Hoffman, 1998: p.71). This statement implies that the theories of displacement targeting discussed elsewhere in this volume (Silke) apply as far back as 1972 – that as more obvious targets associated with the enemy state become more protected then

‘softer’ targets may be selected (at a time when the Olympics did not represent such a ‘hardened’ target). More recently, for example, A US RAND report noted that in mid 2004 the South East Asian group Jemaah Islamaya had apparently concluded that targeting ‘well-protected targets was beyond its capabilities and instead opted for attacks on relatively unprotected soft targets’ (Rand, Vol. 2, p73.). So in relation to sports events and people one has to consider in the post 9/11 world (where more obvious targets may be well protected) that alternative targets may be chosen. With the exception of the Olympics, where its main venues are likely to be well protected, sports and sportspeople more broadly may become targets as alternative and ‘softer’ options.

Indeed, sports beyond just the Olympics have been the object of terrorist attention before. It was widely believed that the IRA was behind the kidnap of the Derby winning racehorse Shergar in 1983 and the same group was responsible for coded bomb warnings that resulted in the abandonment of the Aintree Grand National in 1997. In May 2002 ETA detonated a car bomb outside the Bernabau stadium just before a Champions League football match between Real Madrid and Barcelona, and in 2008 a suicide bomber attacked the start of a marathon outside Colombo, killing twelve people including a former Olympic marathon runner and a national athletics coach. In January 2008 it was reported that the Dakar rally was cancelled because of ‘direct’ threats of terrorism (Guardian, January 2008) while the same reason was cited for the withdrawal of the English badminton team from the World Championships in Hyderabad in August 2009. More profoundly, in March 2009 six policemen and a bus driver were killed and seven cricketers and a coach were injured when the Sri Lankan cricket team’s convoy was attacked by gunmen in Lahore, and on January 1st 2010 nearly a hundred were killed when a suicide bomber attacked a volleyball match in Laki Marwat, Pakistan. A week later the Togo national team was attacked by gunmen, killing at least two and injuring seven. In April 2010 explosive devices were planted outside Chinnaswamy cricket stadium in Bangalore shortly before an Indian Premier League match.

A distinction should be drawn between those terrorist attacks that directly target sports events and people (such as Lahore) and those that don’t but that do have broader security implications for the safety of such events (such as Mumbai). Terrorism in general has had a serious impact on cricket in Pakistan and its prospects of hosting touring teams. The Mumbai attacks that lasted from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 killing over 170 people, and that captured the attention of the world’s media, was followed by the withdrawal of India from a planned cricket tour there in January 2009. Pakistan also lost out on hosting the 2009 International Cricket Council Champions Trophy. For many the Lahore attacks only served to confirm Pakistan as an insecure place to play cricket. South Africa also withdrew from a scheduled October/November 2010 tour there and, at the time of writing, there seems little prospect of any international cricket taking place in Pakistan in the foreseeable future. This has left its cricket team with the only option of playing its ‘home’ games in neutral venues.

The impact of terrorism on sport has been felt in India as the Mumbai attacks also called into question the safety of India as a cricketing venue, with the prestigious Indian Premier League having to be relocated to South Africa in April 2009, while after the Lahore attack on a

sporting target, there have been concerns for the safety of the Commonwealth Games in India in October 2010. After Mumbai a leading English cricket commentator proclaimed, due to the subsequent ‘oppressive security measures taken in the hotels and cricket grounds in Chennai and Mohali before Christmas [2008]’, that ‘if we’re honest we know terrorism’s won in India’ (Agnew, 2009). Aside from the direct attack on its cricketers at Lahore, Sri Lankan cricket had also suffered some years earlier (in 1996) when a bomb attack in the capital of Colombo prompted Australia to withdraw from a World Cup cricket match. Further afield, and beyond cricket, golf also became the victim of terrorism when the United States Ryder Cup team postponed its golf match with Europe in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

### **The targeting of sports – a developing trend?**

Although there has been a spate of terrorist attacks on sports recently it is difficult to argue that it represents part of a developing trend where sports events and sportspeople will increasingly be targeted by terrorists. One attack that would feature strongly (because of its high profile) in any such hypothesis of a developing trend was that carried out on the Togo national football team by the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), or a faction of it. There is, however, some doubt as to whether or not the team itself was earmarked for attack. Although such reports should be treated with serious caution, the ‘Secretary General’ of the group was quoted as saying that ‘this attack was not aimed at the Togolese players but at the Angolan forces at the head of the convoy... So it was pure chance that the gunfire hit the players’ (Sturcke et al, 2010). It is, of course, difficult to verify how genuine these claims are (especially when factions of the FLEC movement have targeted foreign nationals before for kidnap), and the attack (particularly the shooting of the team’s bus) undoubtedly gave enormous exposure to the group and its cause of an independent Cabinda. This does not mean, however, that it generated any sympathy for its goal – in fact the ‘condolences’ that were expressed to the victims’ families and the Togolese government might suggest that the perpetrators felt the attack to be a mistake that was counterproductive to its cause. Certainly, any future such attacks against foreign sports teams would render such sentiments as hollow. In conclusion, it is by no means clear, and probably unlikely, that this type of attack is something that would be repeated as part of a tactical shift by the group or its offshoots.

The other recent attacks were also arguably borne of local and regional agendas. The suicide attack on volleyball spectators was said to be a response to Laki Marwat residents who had established a militia to expel militants from the area (BBC, 2010), while the Lahore attack on the Si Lankan cricket team was the latest riposte in Pakistan’s struggle to combat its extremists within. In recent times, therefore, (and the Togo case notwithstanding) it appears that only South Asia has suffered from clearly deliberate attacks against sports events and people.

It is therefore premature to suggest any trend towards sports targeting on the part of terrorists, although terrorism in general has clearly had a major impact on sport in Pakistan and India in particular. One should not assume, however, that sports events, teams and individuals would not be targeted in the future and in other parts of the world, including Europe and the US, especially given the nature of the contemporary international terrorist threat. The utility of targeting such events and people varies. Some with nationalist agendas, who may to some extent be answerable to domestic political constituencies, might refrain from attacking iconic sportspeople who have a wide following, or from causing a high number of casualties at

sports events, for fear of public revulsion that would be detrimental to their cause.<sup>3</sup> For others, who are driven by a religious and international ideology that justifies attacking all ‘infidels’ such restrictions may not apply. This includes Al Qaeda which has a broad category of targets and no aversion to causing mass casualties. Moreover, the global attention that the Lahore cricket and Togo football episodes attracted might deem such targets as appealing options for those whose ideological parameters permit such attacks. The utility of sports events as targets, then, lies in the presence of large concentrations of ‘infidels’, at the same time as providing the potential for widespread publicity – the higher the target’s profile then the greater the publicity. The list of potential sporting targets is endless and their security provision is variable. Quite apart from national sporting events, in the UK alone there are nearly fifty Premiership, Championship and League football matches every week during the football season, not to mention major club rugby fixtures in the Heineken Cup, the Guinness Premiership and the Magners League, or indeed county cricket championship fixtures in the summer.

### **Al Qaeda and the London Olympics**

Beyond the fact that events like the Olympics serve to provide a global stage from which terrorists can disseminate their message, and the possibility that sports related targets in general may become increasingly preferred as ‘softer’ options, one should also consider the nature of the contemporary terrorist threat and what impact this may have on the vulnerability of sports events and the Olympics in particular. Al Qaeda sees the United Kingdom as culpable for Muslim suffering, most particularly through Britain’s resolute support for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. As such bin Laden and his deputy, al Zawahiri, have repeatedly warned the UK that it will be held to account for its role abroad. As noted earlier in this volume, there are also significant numbers within Britain who would happily oblige by perpetrating attacks within the homeland.

While any terrorist attack on the Olympics is also sure to generate enormous publicity for the perpetrators such a target might fulfil another Al Qaeda objective – the aim of causing mass casualties. Brian Jenkins famously (and, in general, correctly) declared that ‘terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead’ but it is an assertion that has increasingly been brought into question (for example, after Aum Shinrikyo’s attempt to kill large numbers of people on the Tokyo subway in 1995) and it no longer holds true for the contemporary terrorist threat inspired by Al Qaeda. Indeed, the convergence of a radical religious ideology that justifies perpetrating mass casualties and a capability of using unconventional weapons amounts to a nightmare scenario for governments.

Therefore, any heavy population centres or any event where there is a mass congregation of people or ‘infidels’ potentially represents a target for Al Qaeda. Thus, not only do the Olympics provide an enormous opportunity to publicise its cause but, such is the open-ended category of targets legitimised by its doctrine, it also provides heavy concentrations of people

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<sup>3</sup> They may, however, still perpetrate lower level attacks that can still cause death and injury and may do so with the aim of achieving maximum disruption rather than mass casualties.

for the network to target. Indeed, Afzal Ashraf notes in this volume that the Encyclopaedia of Afghan Jihad, for example, has included football stadiums as suitable targets.

Beyond the publicity potential and the fact that the games represents a mass casualty target, there are other potential reasons for an attack on the Olympics. Much has been made recently of the view that Al Qaeda is on the back foot. In a January 2009 interview the Director General of MI5 spoke of the progress being made in the UK against Islamic extremists that was having a ‘chilling effect’ and was forcing them ‘to keep their heads down’ (MI5 website). In his Mansion House foreign policy speech in November 2009 the British Prime Minister announced that ‘methodically, and patiently, we are disrupting and disabling the existing leadership of Al Qaeda’ and ‘since January 2008 seven of the top dozen figures in Al Qaeda have been killed, depleting its reserve of experienced leaders and sapping its morale’ (Gordon Brown, Mansion House speech, November 16<sup>th</sup> 2009). In this context Al Qaeda may want to show that it still has the capability of launching major attacks, not least to motivate and mobilise its supporters and to counter such claims that its morale was being sapped. Much of its effort is focused in Pakistan but an attack in the UK during games time would send a powerful and symbolic message that it still very much has a global capability. It would also cite the cause of any attack as the British and NATO presence in Afghanistan (if the British are still there) or indeed UK involvement in any other theatre abroad, with the aim of undermining the British public’s commitment to such endeavours. Thus, not only would the resolve of the British in tolerating or supporting foreign exploits be tested by deaths of British soldiers abroad but also potentially by civilian casualties at home.

The question as to whether or not Al Qaeda will try to attack the Olympic Games of 2012 depends, of course, as to what is meant by Al Qaeda. The label has been used to describe the core Al Qaeda leadership headed by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, those groups affiliated to it, and those perhaps relatively autonomous individuals who want to carry out acts in the name of Al Qaeda’s ideology. The level at which any attack is planned may have a direct bearing on the sophistication and type of tactics that might be used.

As a decentralised global network it is not often clear which attacks have been planned and authorised by Al Qaeda itself and which ones have been carried out by relatively autonomous groups of individuals who want to perpetrate terrorist attacks in its name. The targeting calculus may be different for the two. This links in with an important debate that has a direct implication for the way governments might appropriately respond to the contemporary international terrorist threat and, indeed, on the level of sophistication that the authorities in 2012 may be confronted with in any terrorist attack. The discussion revolves around the belief on the one hand that the contemporary threat is largely composed of autonomous individuals and groups inspired by Al Qaeda and wanting to act in its name (articulated by Marc Sageman in *Leaderless Jihad*, 2008) and, on the other, that the terrorist plots that are being monitored by the security services and those that have been uncovered are more centrally directed from elsewhere (usually Pakistan) than has hitherto been acknowledged (a view put forward by Bruce Hoffman, 2008). Since this debate materialised in 2008 it appears that the latter analysis has been borne out by both security service assessments and court

findings in the UK. It transpired, for example, that the transatlantic ‘airline plot’ was largely directed from Pakistan and the Prime Minister (citing the Director General of MI5) announced that three quarters of the most serious plots that the security service was currently tracking have links to Pakistan (Brown, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

This debate on the structure of Al Qaeda has implications both for the type of tactics that might be employed and how one might respond to the threat more broadly. If self-motivated individuals are acting autonomously in response to how they see their environments (both domestically and internationally) then policies can be adopted in the form of social programmes to address such perceptions. On the other hand, if key players are involved in recruitment and training then an approach that seeks to apprehend these pivotal people might take priority. A combination of both approaches would seem to be sensible because even if there is some form of direction from countries like Pakistan clearly they are recruiting willing people who are either already radicalised to some degree, or are vulnerable to radicalisation.

As far as the implications for terrorist tactics are concerned, relatively autonomous groups are arguably likely to be more amateur and less organised in their approach than those who have received a degree of training, organisation and competence from experienced operators abroad. The disparate nature of the threat, then, can account for the range of attack scenarios that may emanate from what we call Al Qaeda: from the botched London and Glasgow attacks of June 2007 to the more sophisticated transatlantic bomb plot of 2006.<sup>4</sup> As far as the Olympics are concerned the threat scenario includes multiple and simultaneous suicide attacks (a hallmark of Al Qaeda operations) as well as amateur attempts to act in Al Qaeda’s name. Yet, even with the latter the Olympic context would propel them into highly dramatic events. Likewise attacks away from the Olympic site, or against the transport network, but clearly designed to disrupt the Olympics, would also receive worldwide attention. Indeed, any attack in the UK during the Olympics would arguably be seen as an attack on the Olympics itself. The choice of targets, however, would be highly dependent on the perceived level of security around them, with preferred targets, such as Olympic venues and certainly the Olympic Park itself, becoming less attractive as a result.

## Dissident Irish Republicans

The utility of attacking the Olympic Games is, of course, likely to be different for different terrorist organisations. Al Qaeda and those adhering to its ideology have shown a propensity to cause mass casualties, hence crowded places may have a particular allure. The tactics of other more ‘traditional’ terrorist groups may fall into the category of ‘terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead’. This might apply to nationalist/separatist organisations that claim to represent a domestic constituency.

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that cells with such direction from elsewhere may not also botch their attacks such as the one that attempted to blow up underground trains on July 21<sup>st</sup> 2005.

Of particular concern in this regard for the UK has been the continuing and increasing activity of dissident republicans who have now inherited the mantle of traditional republican ideology from the IRA. In the longer term if the peace process does not ultimately deliver a united Ireland it is a doctrine that is potent enough to lure more Irish republicans to the ‘physical force’ tradition and its imperative of driving the British from the province through the use of violence. On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 Sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar were shot dead by the Real IRA and, according to the Independent Monitoring Commission, this ‘represented a major escalation of RIRA activity’ (IMC, 22<sup>nd</sup> report). Two days later the Continuity IRA claimed responsibility for the killing of PC Stephen Carroll. In September 2009 a 460 pound bomb was discovered in Forkhill, Armagh (IMC, 22<sup>nd</sup> report). The Commission warned that ‘both RIRA and CIRA had remained extremely active and dangerous’ that they had shown ‘a capability to plan and organise’ and that their activity since the early summer of 2008 ‘had been consistently more serious than at any time since [they] had started to report in April 2004’ (IMC, 22<sup>nd</sup> report). In the six months between March and August 2009 ‘the seriousness, range and tempo of their activities all changed for the worse’ (IMC, 22<sup>nd</sup> report).

Dissident republicans were responsible for the Omagh bomb in 1998 that killed 29 people and unborn twins. This was in many ways seen as an ‘own goal’ as the public revulsion against the attack and the perpetrators forced the Real IRA into a temporary ceasefire. Nevertheless, it did not prevent the group from targeting civilian areas once it had re-launched its campaign. One feature of this particular threat that gives cause for concern for 2012 is that Irish republicans have traditionally regarded successful attacks on the mainland as of much greater value than those carried out in Northern Ireland as they are believed to have a much more compelling impact on the British public. Part of IRA strategy when it was not on ceasefire was to persuade the British public through coercion to in turn compel the government to withdraw from the province.

The Real IRA (which split from the IRA in 1997) has also targeted the mainland, most particularly through a spate of attacks in 2000-01, including bomb attacks on Hammersmith Bridge and Ealing. Bombs also exploded outside the BBC Television Centre in Shepherds Bush, and outside a postal sorting office in Hendon, while a bomb failed to detonate properly in Birmingham city centre. The group also launched an audacious missile attack against the MI6 headquarters building. There were no deaths as a result of these attacks (although there were injuries) but, at least in the cases of a bomb exploding outside busy pubs at closing time in Ealing Broadway (August 2001) and the Birmingham device, this was because of good fortune rather than any intent to avoid fatalities on the part of the perpetrators. In relation to current dissident republican activity the IMC noted that ‘in April RIRA told a newspaper that it would mount an attack in Great Britain when it became opportune to do so’ (IMC, 22<sup>nd</sup> report). There is no question that if the group had the capability of attacking the UK mainland then it would follow through with this ominous warning.

In theory organisations like the Real IRA, as a nationalist/separatist organisation, would not be interested in causing mass casualties at the Olympics of 2012 but rather would aim to fully

exploit the British Olympics for three main reasons – to generate international publicity for its cause, to prove that it is capable of carrying out such an attack, and to disrupt the British attempts to deliver a successful and safe games. More strategically, it would want to use violence to rejuvenate the traditional republican belief that partition in Ireland and any ‘partitionist’ political dispensation in Northern Ireland are inherently unsustainable. Dissident republicans would, one can assume, derive enormous satisfaction from disrupting the games that might otherwise have been a great source of national pride for the British government and its people. Any aim to cause as many casualties as possible, however, would prove enormously counter-productive (as Omagh showed), diminishing any prospect of increasing the little support base that dissident republicans have both at home and abroad in the United States.

Aside from the above considerations, one of the calculations that terrorist organisations have to make is whether or not it would be counter-productive to their cause to attack the Olympics itself (directly or indirectly). For example, one commentator, speaking of Munich 1972, suggested that it was a ‘net loss’ for the Palestinian cause arguing that:

‘Munich ... gave the Palestinians an image of mindless, bloodthirsty thugs, more so as the venue for the operation is considered historically a sacrosanct occasion of hope and peace. Accordingly, this put the Palestinians outside the circle of civilised humanity in the eyes of many who might otherwise have been sympathetic’ (Sanan, p. 107).

Indeed, given the international and peaceful ethos of ‘Olympism’ and given that one of the aims of many terrorist organisations is to attract international sympathy for its cause (and not widespread condemnation) perhaps targeting the Olympics is not conducive to the goals of some terrorist organisations. Nevertheless, as noted above, this particular concern might be outweighed by the enormous publicity that any attack on the Olympics would generate. In this context one could perhaps conclude that, in the case of dissident Irish republicans, they would aim to cause maximum *disruption* to the British showpiece rather than the maximum casualties that Al Qaeda has sought to perpetrate.

## Terrorist Tactics

Appreciating the different ideologies of terrorist organisations that might be inclined to attack the Olympic Games in turn sheds light on the type of tactics that may be used. The doctrine of Al Qaeda justifies attacks against all who are ‘infidels’. Bin Laden himself explicitly stated in his 1998 fatwa that: ‘the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it ... This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah’. It is this threat and the desire to cause mass casualties, therefore, that provides the greatest danger to the London Olympics of 2012. One feature of the Olympics that lends itself to the modus operandi of Al Qaeda is that it has multiple venues. Simultaneous attacks have been one of the hallmarks of the contemporary threat and if Al Qaeda was considering a serious and

sophisticated attack on the Olympics then this is a scenario that should be factored into security planning. A worrying development that also has to be noted is the organised gun attacks in Mumbai and on the Sri Lankan cricket team. Again, the thought of professionally trained gunmen shooting at crowds in congested areas with advanced weaponry is a concerning one, though it is hoped that security checks will be effective enough to prevent such a scenario.

If dissident Irish republicans were to try to attack the London Olympics it is unlikely that they would aim to cause mass casualties. Although the possibility of a bomb attack should not be discounted, their level of capability may be limited to hoax calls with the aim of achieving maximum disruption. There could, of course, also be acts of sabotage. This would not be a new tactic as far as the Olympics are concerned. At the 1992 Winter Olympic Games of 1992 in Albertville television transmission cables were severed by a member of a radical environmentalist in order to disrupt the broadcast of the opening ceremony (Sanan, 128). There were also sabotage attacks that attempted to disrupt the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona games, one of which was carried out by the small Spanish Marxist group GRAPO (Sanan, 128).

## **Conclusion**

Major sports events, and especially the Olympics, provide terrorist organisations with opportunities for generating enormous international publicity for their demands. Terrorism is communication and these events provide an avenue through which to communicate its message to as wide an audience as possible. The Olympics in general is likely to be well protected but it still represents an attractive target for terrorists who would aim to benefit from the global exposure of any attack and to disrupt the host country's attempt to deliver a 'safe and secure' Olympics. Other sports events and sportspeople are less well protected than those during Games time and there have been a number of recent attacks and threats against such targets. Terrorism has lately had a major impact on sport in Pakistan and India, for example, but it is too premature to suggest that recent events are part of a growing trend of terrorist attacks against sporting targets in general. Nevertheless, in the face of the contemporary Al Qaeda threat and its modus operandi, there is no reason to hope that such targets will be exempt from the targeting calculus of terrorists in the months and years ahead.

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