

Major sport events and global threats/responses

Kimberly S Schimmel examines the intensification of security measures for major sporting events and why these developments have largely not been publically challenged



the US's Super Bowl now carries the nation's highest security designation, meaning that the Secret Service (the federal agency responsible for protecting the President) assumes the mandated role as lead agency in providing security. Planning for Super Bowl security currently begins two years prior to the event and can involve up to 70 agencies (Schimmel, 2011).

'Conspicuous internationalism'

There is no denying that major sport events hold great symbolic utility for terrorist actors. Fussey and Coaffee (2012) have documented that since 1988 a wide range of diverse groups including 'ethno-separatists, state-sponsored proxies, left-wing groups, right wing extremists, environmentalists, violent jihadi extremists and anarchists have targeted the Olympic Games. Interestingly, even though 'conspicuous internationalism' is a defining feature of sport mega events, and the current historical moment

is supposedly marked by 'international terrorism', Fussey and Coaffee point out that many of these groups are grounded in specific local socio-political contexts. Nevertheless, their analysis shows that while terrorist threats are almost always locally produced, the strategies used

to combat them are increasingly similar around the globe. A number of distinct approaches have emerged, forming a general model of major

Congratulations local citizens! Your city has just won the right to host the next major sport event! The eyes of the world will be upon you. Here come the athletes, the tourists, the sponsors, and the media. Here come the city beautification projects, children's cultural events, fan festivals, and volunteers' rallies. Oh, and you can also expect to be surveilled, digitally scanned, corralled, barricaded, patted-down, have your city permanently reconfigured and militarised, your traffic patterns altered, and your domestic legal structures ignored. Enjoy the games!

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Symbolic importance

Major sport events have taken on tremendous economic, political, social and symbolic importance. The biggest among them – the 'mega events' – such as the Olympic Games and FIFA's World Cup finals are global media spectacles that have been linked to urban regeneration, tourism development, and the status ranking of nations. And though lesser in scale, major sport events such as the National Football League's (NFL) annual Super Bowl in the US have come to signify the emerging or sustaining urban status and favourable business climate of the host city. Over the last couple of decades, the development and growth of these events has entered a new phase, the most striking

illustration of which is the enormous importance placed on security. Since 1972, when the Palestine Black September group attacked Israeli athletes and coaches at the Munich Summer Games, security concerns have focused on the prevention of terrorism.

However, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US ushered in a new phase of securitisation represented by huge expansions of costs and personnel. The cost of providing security at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games,

for example, was approximately US \$179.6 million, whereas the US \$2.2 billion budgeted for the 2012

London Games is almost certain to be exceeded.

Likewise, in 2000 Sydney utilised almost 5,000 police officers and up to 7,000 contract and volunteer security agents, whereas the London Metropolitan Police have requested to hire an additional 6,000-7,000 more officers and thousands more contract security agents specifically for the 2012 Summer Games (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010). In the post-9/11 era,

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sport event security oriented around a number of core themes: an enhanced urban militarism that includes the use of military tactics, personnel, and assets; the use of private sector security providers, which are routinely large US corporations; the expansion of integrated surveillance technology; reconfiguring physical space with permanent architectural features that 'design-in' counter-terrorism measures, and; policing tactics aimed at social control and regulating behaviours deemed to be undesirable (for example protests or unapproved commercial activity). There are, of course, a variety of local particulars that shape the deployment of major sport event security, but the core strategies, argue Fussey and Coaffee, provide an overarching homogeneity of security practices across time and place. Since 9/11 the deployment of those strategies has escalated.

Did 9/11 really change everything?

The short answer is, no, not *really*. Many commentators have highlighted how numerous 'changes' in the event security and in the urban milieu more generally were actually a continuation of trends already underway before 9/11, but reinforced and aggravated concern about large-scale terrorism. The 9/11 attacks in the US and subsequent attacks in European countries such as the UK and Spain prompted governments on both sides of the Atlantic to reinvigorate their respective efforts to ensure domestic security. European countries mostly worked within existing institutional structures and relied on decades of experience in dealing with domestic terrorist groups. The US meanwhile established in 2001 a single federal department, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), whose priority mission is to prevent terrorist attacks in the United States. Expansion of sport mega-events to

the emerging nations of the Global South – for example, the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, 2010 and 2014 World Cup Finals in South Africa and Brazil, and the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi – bring with them a particular set of security concerns (see Giulianotti and Klauser, 2012) in the post-9/11 context. After 9/11 there has been more availability of counter-terrorism resources and an intensified political, public and media focus on terrorist threats and attendant responses. The only thing that *really* changed after 9/11 was the insistence that 'everything changed'.

Accelerated, intensifying militarisation

As I have argued elsewhere (Schimmel, 2011; 2012) in the US, the security strategies of the federal government and those of sport entrepreneurs – in this case the owners of the NFL – are mutually beneficial in ways that help secure the NFL's position and profitability and, more importantly, help implement and secure consensus for the US Department of Homeland Security's continued 'war on terror'. The enormous security expansion at NFL events, especially the annual Super Bowl game, justifies the accelerated, intensifying militarisation of US urban space in the post-9/11 era. The ongoing claim by the NFL and multiple government sources that 'everything changed' on 9/11 reminds us constantly of the violence of the attacks and of our continued vulnerability. Fear and uncertainty regarding when 'they' are going to hit us next becomes the new normal. The Super Bowl, the cities and stadiums that host it, and we, as football fans and residents of urban communities, are portrayed as being under constant threat. I suggest that since 'everything (supposedly) changed on September 11' and since the deployment of state and corporate power is the 'necessary' (and thus incontestable)

response to protect us, there are few public outcries to the fact that massive military build-up now accompanies the Super Bowl, that it is an extraordinary incursion into urban civic life, and that it subjects citizens to military operational and security procedures that they do not encounter anywhere else, including at US airports (the NFL even prohibits 'running' in NFL zones of the city).

Despite the possibility that escalating economic expenditures and intensifying militarisation of urban space can contribute to *downgrading* the quality of life for urban residents, the massive security build-up attached to major sport events is often presented as 'good' for sport fans and urban residents, whose very presence exposes them as 'soft targets' for terrorists, to use the military parlance. By effectively incorporating new vulnerability and security frames into extant pro-growth and urban regeneration ideologies, the status of host cities is enhanced – the 'major sport event' confirms our city's or nation's importance; the eyes of the world are upon us and we have the military protection to prove it. ■

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