(In)security and the re-ordered Olympic city

Pete Fussey explores some key issues around Olympic-related security and insecurity

The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games are often characterised as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalise some of the most deprived areas of London, whilst inspiring its inhabitants to undertake a plethora of cultural and physical pursuits. Yet, for all the rhetoric of 'business as usual', the Games represent a considerable and, in many respects, exceptional set of challenges for security practitioners. For local residents, repeatedly described as inheritors of variously imagined legacies, the Olympics will impose new and substantive regimes of control and regulation -

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not all of which will be removed once the Games have departed. At the same time, Olympic-related urban boosterism and attendant attempts to rebrand the locale have already transformed and drawn a number of additional reordering and securitisation processes into the area. This paper explores some key issues around Olympic-related security and insecurity. It briefly considers some of the diversity of Olympic terrorist-related threats and contrasts these with the more internationalised and, to some extent, standardised features of Olympic security programmes. Finally, the significance of these issues for London 2012 is explored, particularly the ways in which regeneration and security are increasingly interconnected with the hosting of sporting mega-events.

The diversity of terrorist related threats

Despite the varying operational and targeting activities that diverse ideologies bring (for example, generally different targeting preferences of right-wing extremists when compared to ethno-nationalists), the Olympic Games hold symbolic utility for a diverse range of terrorist actors. Within these definitions are examples of right wing extremism (Lake Placid 1980, Atlanta 1996), left wing extremism (Athens 2004), ethno-nationalism (Sarajevo 1984, Barcelona 1992, Beijing 2008) and state terrorism (Mexico 1968, by North Korea in 1988). In almost all cases, these Olympic-related threats and attacks have occurred in the lead-up or opening stages of the Games. Such occurrences contrast sharply with the provision of Olympic security legacies (see below). In addition despite the conspicuous internationalism of sporting mega events, and an era of supposed 'international terrorism', nearly all of these threats and activities were grounded in specific local socio-political contexts. These localised dynamics sit uneasily against the more globalised models of security deployed policing such events.

Olympic security strategies

Since the attacks at Munich, Olympic security projects have largely consisted of a widespread securitisation of entire geographies and a reordering of urban governance. Here, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) invests responsibility for security to the local hosts yet (since 1983) retains a significant co-ordinating function. Some of these initiatives represent genuine transformations of urban security regimes (such as at Athens 2004), whilst others represent a catalyzation of existing processes, such as urban militarisation and the privatisation of the public realm.

Overall, it is possible to trace a high degree of standardisation of Olympic security strategies across time, place and ideology. This is not to suggest that internationally-derived security models are simply applied, nor represent the transportation of 'immutable mobiles' (Latour, 1987), to diverse local settings. A range of localised features, including vernacular security cultures and the scale of extant security infrastructures, also temper such planning. Nevertheless, approaches are repeatedly orientated around the core principles of command, control, co-ordination, communications and intelligence. Within these principles a number of specific strategies are consistently applied, including:

- Militarisation; the application of military-type approaches to security and the manifest use of existing military personnel

and related assets. In such circumstances, mega-event militarisation may be seen to exemplify existing processes of urban governance and trends towards military urbanism (Graham, 2010).

- Privatisation; following the political and financial disasters of Munich and Montreal, a key moment here was the entire privatisation of the 1984 Los Angeles Games. Private security provision has since become a key feature of mega-event security. In some senses it is an ephemeral provision, with temporary and easily terminated contracts. In other senses it may become more permanent as the legacies of Tokyo (1964) and Seoul (1988) attest.

- Technology and surveillance; since Montreal's first major deployment of surveillance cameras at the 1976 Games, ever-advancing surveillance technologies have become a central component of mega-event security. Such measures have further intensified and diversified since 9/11. Examples include biometric scanners and technological air samplers at Salt Lake City, (unsuccessful) technological intelligence gathering and sharing measures at Athens and powerful integrated surveillance camera systems in Beijing.

- Physical design; Olympic Games regularly involve a reconfiguration of the physical environment via a series of efforts to 'design-in' situational security features. These range from large-scale Haussmannisation projects (e.g. Rome and Beijing) to more subtle features including embedding electronic explosives scanners, sealing potential concealment points, vehicle routing, and the use of blast-resistant materials.

- Behavioural regulation by physical and legal means;

'zero-tolerance' style policing approaches and exclusion orders have been a consistent feature of Olympic security operations since Montreal (1976) and deployed in settings as diverse as Sydney and Beijing (albeit with variations of scale). Such approaches are complimented with a range of regulatory instruments to proscribe a broad suite of behaviours. Indeed, a condition of hosting the Games is that prospective candidates adhere to the IOC's Olympic Charter. Rule 51, Section 3 clearly states that hosts should allow no protests in or near Olympic venues, thus enabling rules established by unelected officials to override (often hard-won) domestic rights.

The significance for London 2012

For 2012, East London's densely populated host geographies meet with the complexity of Olympic-related urban governance in a number of ways. Such complexity is amplified by the much-trumpeted commitment to London's 'regeneration Games', with inbuilt 'legacy' benefits of wider urban renewal. Whilst such ambitions are not exactly new – urban transformation has generally featured since Rome (1960) – London's adaptation of the 'Barcelona model' has brought the Games in from the suburbs. Here, *de novo* wholesale approaches to both security and regeneration are impossible to achieve: Olympic-related interventions have to operate within an extant, complex and diverse urban milieu. Thus developments reminiscent of Sorkin's (1992) *variation on the theme park* – where connections between spatial and cultural geographies are dissolved, and where contrived commercialised visions of order are underpinned by obsessions with security and segregation – are compressed into and around a brown field site bordered by Stratford, Leyton and Hackney Wick.

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Securitised sterile promontory

Much attention has rightly focused on the raft of security measures due to be deployed during the Games and in and around the securitised sterile promontory of the Olympic Park. Shorn of inconveniently located social housing, allotments and small and medium sized enterprises, the site is encircled by an £80 million electrified fence and protected by strict regimes of access and entitlement. The physical environment has been built to the most advanced Association of Police Officers' (ACPO) standards of secure-by-design ever devised and a raft of surveillance measures including aerial surveillance 'drones', advanced networked automatic number plate recognition cameras and extensive mobile CCTV networks are to be deployed (Fussey et al., 2011). The latter includes the installation of state-of-the-art hardware relocated from the controversial and cancelled 'Project Champion' scheme – an initiative designed to encircle two predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods in Birmingham with 290 overt and covert surveillance cameras (BBC, 2011). Here, the exceptional event renders permissible what was prohibited months before. Considerable emphasis is also placed on the non-technical. Olympic security operations are overseen by complex multi-agency security governance arrangements with priorities mapped against the UK government's counter-terrorism CONTEST strategy and involve the procurement of 23,700 additional non-police security staff (a figure revised upwards by nearly 300 per cent following the 2011 summer disturbances). Many of these features will resonate long after the Games have departed. For example, tenders for private Olympic security contracts foregrounded the need for 'legacy' to be built into funded initiatives and the Olympic Village has been used to validate the revised ACPO design standards with the intention that they can be applied to future projects.

A dangerously imagined landscape

Such legacies are also pronounced in the gentrification initiatives

surrounding the Olympic Park. Drawing more affluent populations to what for centuries has been a dangerously imagined landscape (see Hobbs, 1988) has shepherded in a more intensive securitisation of East London. Here, regeneration and securitisation are yoked together. These measures have many forms. Some are formal and physical, including the standard embedding of situational crime prevention features into new housing developments, and increased demands for security that traditionally accompany the arrival of new and comparatively prosperous residents (Bauman, 2000). Other measures relate to the governance and privatisation of space, such as the recentring of Stratford's retail centre to Westfield's highly regulated Stratford City development and ambiguities around the future ownership of much of the (post-) Olympic Park. These developments are complemented by a number of formal legislative instruments that include the enshrining of the

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aforementioned obligations of the Olympic Charter within the *London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act 2006*. Ostensibly designed to prevent flash marketing and thus protect sponsors' privileged access to the Olympic marketplace, key aspects of this legislation (sections 19 and 22) may be fairly unambiguously applied to the restriction of political protest.

Situating the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London has motivated the collision of multiple global and local processes. These particularly relate to the ways in which insecurity – specifically terrorism – is imagined and the responses to it are mobilised. At the same time, promises of legacy and attendant ambitions for urban transformation accent the importance of urban place branding to international as well as domestic audiences. These in turn form powerful drivers for the beautification, securitisation and overall 'purification' of the Olympic

City. As 'legacy' and regeneration become increasingly integrated into the plans of aspiring Olympic hosts, such issues are likely to resonate for some time. ■

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