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Terrorism and Security at the Olympics: Empirical Trends and Evolving Research Agendas

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics. An empirical analysis of Olympic-related terrorism in the period 1968–2014 suggests the need to bring state terrorism into the analysis of terrorism at the Olympics. The empirical data presented in this study underline the significance of state terrorism in this context: the two deadliest attacks in the history of the modern Olympic Games were perpetrated or sponsored by representatives of the state against civilians. The findings indicate the spatial and temporal displacement of Olympic-related terrorism, with the bulk of attacks taking place outside Olympic competitions and away from host cities, as well as its diverse ideological and cultural contexts. The paper reviews and synthesizes the emerging field of critical research on terrorism and security at the Olympics. It is concluded that this historical and sociological work opens up new lines of inquiry and raises significant policy questions by drawing attention to both intended and unanticipated security legacies of the Olympics, including the wider social implications of Olympic security operations.

KEYWORDS

Terrorism; counter-terrorism; security; Olympic; legacy

Introduction

Terrorism is a recurring historical phenomenon.¹ The Olympic Games have not been immune to acts of political violence. The global stage that the sport mega-event provides arguably makes the Olympics attractive to terrorists who seek to inflict maximum damage and fear or to maximize publicity for their campaigns. Extremist groups may attack the event not because they bear any particular grievance against the Olympic movement, but because of its potent symbolism in relation to their violent campaigns against the enemy.² The host government or other states or communities involved in the Olympics are typically the primary target of the attack.³ The impact of terrorism at the Olympics reaches beyond the event itself. The 1972 Munich Olympics, when Black September extremists killed five Israeli athletes, six Israeli coaches and a police officer, not only had a lasting impact on West German society,⁴ but coupled terrorism and the Olympics in popular consciousness and

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provided an impetus for the development of the US government's counterterrorism effort and Olympic security operations.⁵

While the year 1972 is a landmark in the intersections of terrorism and the Olympics, the events of 11 September 2001 have accelerated and amplified the course of security and terrorism issues at the Olympics. The current security context provides both an opportunity and a challenge for authorities to demonstrate their ability to defend themselves and their allies against the threat of terrorism. This security environment is characterized by what terrorism scholar Ronald Crelinsten calls 'September 12 thinking', which considers that terrorism is a new form of war which must be fought with different, far-reaching means.⁶ September 12 thinking informs security responses surrounding the Olympics. The ever greater efforts to securing the Games are reflected in the exponential growth in Olympic security budgets, to the point where the Games now exhibit one of the world's largest security operations outside of war.⁷ For example, senior security consultant Neil Fergus hailed the 2004 Athens Summer Games as 'the greatest security operation since Alexander the Great marched through Persia',⁸ while political scientist Ying Yu has described the 2008 Beijing Olympics as 'the largest peacetime security operation in history'.⁹

Terrorism and security have received less academic scrutiny than other aspects of the Games. Nearly a decade ago, sociologists John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter predicted that security issues 'are likely to come more to the fore in production of sports mega-events' and 'will form a substantial research theme in future studies of sports mega-events'.¹⁰ They were correct. In recent years, research on terrorism and security at the Olympics and other major sports events has burgeoned. Contributions to the knowledge base have come from a range of disciplines and fields including history, sociology, criminology, political science, international relations, communication science, sport management and legal studies. It is timely to take stock of these contributions and identify how they inform, or can inform, intellectual and public understandings of terrorism and security at the Olympics.

The aim of this paper, then, is to examine the contemporary intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics. This aim will be met through an examination of empirical trends in Olympic-related terrorism in the period 1968–2014, as well as a review and synthesis of contemporary and emerging research agendas. The broader literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism will be used to contextualize and interpret the identified trends and research agendas.

Terrorism is defined here as the intentional use of, or threat to use, violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims.¹¹ The deliberate targeting of civilians is what distinguishes a terrorist act from other forms of political violence in which, for instance, military units are targeted. The Olympic-related attacks examined in this paper fit this definition because they (primarily) target non-combatants. An area of contention is whether the term 'terrorism' should apply to the actions of state bodies in the same way that it applies to the actions of non-state actors. The absence of state terrorism from orthodox accounts of terrorism has been subject to scholarly critique.¹² Indeed, state terrorism has been far more prevalent throughout history and has taken a vastly higher death toll than its non-state counterpart.¹³ State terrorism, defined as acts or threats of politically motivated violence carried out by representatives of the state against civilians, is of particular import for the present purpose. As will be seen, the two deadliest Olympic-related terrorist attacks to date were carried out or sponsored by state actors. Moreover, the historical insight that the tactics that states use to combat terrorism can themselves resemble terrorism is echoed

in recent debates (discussed later in this paper) on the implications of security operations at the Olympics.

The Olympics, like other premier sports events, are thought to be vulnerable to terrorist attacks and have been portrayed as such in political and media discourse, especially in the post-9/11 era.¹⁴ The attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, which killed 130 people, have increased discussions on safety and security at major sporting events, including the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games and the bidding of Paris for the hosting rights to the 2024 Olympic Games.¹⁵ In a series of coordinated attacks, three suicide bombers struck near the Stade de France, the country's national sports stadium, in Saint-Denis, followed by suicide bombings and mass shootings at cafés, restaurants and a music venue in Paris.¹⁶ The first explosion near the stadium occurred while an international friendly football match between France and Germany was underway. Investigators believe the attacker had planned to detonate his explosives belt inside the stadium but did not get past the gates. The bomber reportedly had a match ticket but was turned away during a security check at the gate.¹⁷ Ten minutes after the first explosion, a second bomber, who had been lying in wait, detonated his suicide vest near the stadium. Another 23 min after the second explosion, a third bomber's explosives belt detonated nearby.

The security considerations and actions of governments and organizing committees are well documented. For example, the Olympic Strategic Threat Assessment identified terrorism as the greatest threat to the security of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, ahead of serious crime, domestic extremism and public disorder, and natural hazards.¹⁸ Security costs from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games budget exceeded £550 million.¹⁹ In a similar vein, declassified documents show that the United States and other governments have anticipated the possibility of a terrorist nuclear incident at events such as the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.²⁰ The identification of terrorism as a major threat to the Olympics is reflective of what Ole Wæver and others have called securitization: the process by which an issue, having been labelled an existential threat, is moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where states can control and deal with it without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making.²¹ According to media studies scholar John Tulloch, the mass mediation and political framing of the terrorism-Olympics nexus have become embedded in people's routine daily knowledge, experiences and anxieties by preparing people for the possibility of terrorism and by normalizing the extraordinary measures designed to combat it.²²

Terrorism at the Olympics cannot be fully understood, however, without reference to how terrorist actors portray the Olympics and other major sports events as legitimate targets. Consider, for example, Eric Rudolph's bomb attack on the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, which was one of four separate attacks perpetrated by Rudolph between 1996 and 1998. Rudolph was driven by a complex set of overlapping motives. He believed that violence was necessary to stop abortion and he justified killing law enforcement officers who defended abortion rights. In an 11-page statement released after his guilty pleas, Rudolph described the bombings as being part of a fight 'in the defense of the unborn'.²³ He also stated his specific purpose in bombing Centennial Park:

Under the protection and auspices of the regime in Washington millions of people came out [to] celebrate the ideals of global socialism. Multinational corporations spent billions of dollars, and Washington organized an army of security to protect these best of all games. Even

though the conception and purpose of the so-called Olympic movement is to promote the values of global socialism, as perfectly expressed in the song 'Imagine' by John Lennon, which was the theme of the 1996 games – even though the purpose of the Olympics is to promote these despicable ideals, the purpose of the attack on July 27th was to confound, anger and embarrass the Washington government in the eyes of the world for its abominable sanctioning of abortion on demand.²⁴

Rudolph's plan was 'to force the cancellation of the Games, or at least create a state of insecurity to empty the streets around the venues and thereby eat into the vast amounts of money invested'. For Rudolph, the Olympics were a legitimate target as it symbolized at an abstract level the righteousness of his cause and the evil of his adversaries. Other targets would have been equally suited to this purpose.²⁵ Indeed, Rudolph committed three more bombings, none of which involved sports events.

Eric Rudolph has not been alone in framing the Olympics or other major sports events as a symbolic target for terrorism. Al Qaeda has publically framed major sports events as an attractive target. In 2012, Al Qaeda propagandist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri advocated 'targeting human crowds in order to inflict maximum human losses' in an article in *Inspire*, an online English-language magazine produced by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).²⁶ In the article, Al-Suri mentions several suitable targets including crowded sports arenas. A 2014 issue of *Inspire* discusses the strategic importance of attacking dense crowds and identifies several specific targets including horseracing events and tennis tournaments such as the US Open.²⁷ With regard to the United Kingdom, the article notes:

You have the soccer (football) stadiums especially during Premier League and FA Cup matches. They have worldwide life [*sic*] media coverage. The best time is after the final whistle, when huge crowds leave the stadium and celebrate around the entrances.²⁸

On other occasions explicit reference has been made to the Olympics in extremist rhetoric. In July 2013, Doku Umarov, leader of the Caucasus Emirate, declared his will to disrupt the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, which lies on the western edge of the Caucasus Mountains. In a four-minute video posted on the pro-independence website kavkazcenter.com, Umarov called for all Muslims and his followers to use any methods, including violent ones, in order to achieve this goal:

They [Russia] plan to hold the Olympics on the bones of our ancestors, on the bones of many, many dead Muslims, buried on the territory of our land on the Black Sea, and we as mujahedeen [warriors] are obliged to not permit that, using any methods allowed us by the almighty Allah.²⁹

He continued: 'I call on you, every mujahid, either in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan or on the territory of the Caucasus to use maximum force on the path of Allah to disrupt this Satanic dancing on the bones of our ancestors.'³⁰ In doing so, Umarov lifted the moratorium on attacks on Russian targets outside the North Caucasus region that he had ordered in February 2012 because, according to Umarov, 'unbelievers' in Moscow had treated it as a sign of weakness and 'only increased their persecution of peaceful Muslims'.³¹

Six months after the Umarov video, Vilayat Dagestan, one of the factions that make up the Caucasus Emirate, posted a video warning Russia to expect attacks at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The video showed two men who allegedly perpetrated the 2013 suicide bombings in Volgograd (see Table 1). Their video statement says:

If you hold the Olympics you will receive a present from us, for you [Mr. Putin] and all those tourists who will come over. It will be for all the Muslim blood that is shed every day around the world, be it in Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, all around the world. This will be our revenge.³²

Determined to demonstrate its ability to host the Winter Olympics, Russia stepped up its security to an unprecedented scale. The country reportedly deployed more than 50,000 police and soldiers to secure the event.³³ Dmitry Chernyshenko, the president of the Sochi Winter Olympics Organizing Committee, described the city as ‘the most secure venue on the planet’, while also promising that the tight security measures would not detract from the atmosphere of the Games.³⁴ Yet, critics argued that Russia’s efforts to secure the Olympics did impact the experiences of athletes and spectators, with Ishaan Tharoor, former senior editor at *Time*, calling it ‘the most anxiety-ridden and militarized Olympiad in recent memory.’³⁵

Terrorism at the Olympics, 1968–2014

Data-sets on terrorism at the Olympics are inevitably partial and likely to display a degree of arbitrariness. Existing databases vary enormously in regard to their definitional parameters. For example, while some studies incorporate not only successful attacks but a range of terrorist threats and plots,³⁶ others consider the security investments made to prevent terrorist attacks as part of (‘evidence’ for) the threat.³⁷ This paper uses a narrower approach, one that focuses on Olympic-related terrorist attacks that were actually carried out. However, some conceptual difficulties inevitably remain. Criminologist Pete Fussey notes the complexity of determining what constitutes Olympic-related terrorism by pointing to complicating factors such as when a terrorist attack takes place in a host nation in the run-up to or during the Olympic Games without an apparent connection to the event, yet with considerable impact on Olympic security planning.³⁸ Terrorism can also be ‘Olympic related’ in the sense that it targets members or symbols of the Olympic movement more broadly. The cases discussed below illustrate these complexities.

In order to identify empirical trends in terrorism at the Olympics, three major sources were combined: the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the National Security Archive’s digital material, and the Cold War International History Project’s digital archives. The starting point was the GTD, managed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses of Terrorism (START).³⁹ Its purpose is to enable researchers and analysts to increase understanding of terrorism by providing a comprehensive set of open-source data on incidents of domestic and international terrorism since 1970.⁴⁰ For the present purpose, only GTD records which meet three criteria are included: (1) the violent act must be aimed to attain a political goal; and (2) there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate or convey some other message to a larger audience than the immediate victims; and (3) there must be a reported link to the Olympic Games or the Olympic movement (Olympic Committee members, athletes, etc.).

The GTD was searched for the period 1970–2014. All GTD database records for this period were searched using ‘Olympic*’ as the primary search term across all separate attributes of each incident record. Each incident report in the GTD includes approximately 75 coded variables that can be used for statistical analysis, for example the incident date, country, city, perpetrator, target, tactics used in the attack, types of weapon used, fatalities, injuries, and so forth.⁴¹ The GTD search returned 34 records. Each record was examined in depth and, based on the information provided in the GTD, 15 incidents were

excluded. The main reasons for excluding these records were irrelevance (where targets were non-Olympic-related sites such as 'Olympic Airlines', 'Radio Station Olympica Stereo', 'Olympic Plaza Building', 'Olympic Country club', etc.), and lack of robust information to make an informed decision on the attack's relation to the Olympics. Cases in which the political motivations or the connection with the Olympic movement could not be corroborated were excluded. As a result, the list omits some of the incidents that are mentioned in previous studies,⁴² such as an incident that occurred only days before the 2008 Beijing Olympics in the city of Kashgar in the Western Chinese province of Xinjiang. The incident, labelled a 'terrorist plot' by Chinese state media, killed 16 police officers and injured 16 others.⁴³ Two men with suspected links to the Uyghur separatist movement reportedly drove a dump truck at a group of police officers and threw explosive devices. They attacked the survivors with knives and grenades. China stepped up security around the Beijing Olympics following the attack. However, exile groups and other critics accused the Chinese authorities of exaggerating and manufacturing the terrorist threat to justify indiscriminate arrests and repression in the region.⁴⁴ Foreign tourists who witnessed the incident provided a conflicting interpretation by stating that the attackers appeared to be paramilitary officers, not activists.⁴⁵

The Olympic-related terrorist attacks identified from the GTD were corroborated through an analysis of the National Security Archive and the Cold War International History Project's digital materials, again using 'Olympic*' as the primary search term.⁴⁶ Three additional cases that are not registered in the GTD were identified from these archives. Table 1 lists the final sample of 22 cases.

What does the information conveyed in Table 1 reveal about empirical trends in terrorism at the Olympics? First of all, it shows that since 1968 there have been a number of attacks directly and indirectly related to the Olympic Games. This includes three lethal attacks in host cities during the competition: Munich 1972, Atlanta 1996 and Beijing 2008. The overwhelming majority of attacks (19 in total, or 86%) occurred outside of competitions and targeted a diverse range of victims including officials, athletes, tourists, venues, spectators and local populations. This finding suggests that, overall, the locations of the Olympic Games are quite safe with regard to terrorism.⁴⁷ Terrorist attacks on the Olympics are relatively rare compared to attacks on other types of targets.⁴⁸ Moreover, Table 1 indicates the spatial and temporal displacement of attacks,⁴⁹ a process that appears to have been caused at least in part by the intensified security measures at Olympic venues. A similar displacement process has been observed in other forms of sports-related violence including football hooliganism.⁵⁰

Secondly, the two most lethal terrorist attacks in the history of the modern Olympic Games were acts of state terrorism: the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico in 1968, and the bombing of Korean Air flight 858 in 1987. The 1968 Olympics in Mexico City stand out because the Mexican government used the international attention of the Olympic Games to justify suppressing the nascent student movement and framing them for attacking police officers to initiate the crackdown that led to the Tlatelolco massacre.⁵¹ Mexico pursued the 1968 Olympic bid as a unique opportunity to herald the nation's coming of age.⁵² Increasingly concerned about the effect the student protests would have on the Games and on the country's international reputation, the Mexican government engaged in flagrant repression against organized student actions before the Olympics, culminating in a public massacre that left more than one hundred student and civilian protesters dead. Nineteen years later, on 29 November 1987, Korean Air flight 858, which was flying from Baghdad to Seoul, exploded mid-air upon the detonation of a bomb planted by two North Korean

Table 1. Olympic-related terrorist attacks, 1968–2014.

Year	Country	Fatalities	Description
1968	Mexico	Official death toll unknown; estimated at 100–300	Ten days before the beginning of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Mexican officials shoot and kill an unknown number of student and civilian protesters in Tlatelolco, Mexico City
1972	West Germany	17	Black September kidnaps and murders 11 Israeli Olympic team members (five athletes and six coaches) during the 1972 Munich Olympics. Five of the eight perpetrators and one West German police officer were also killed during the attack and subsequent hostage situation
1976	Barbados	73	Shortly after take-off a bomb explodes on Cubana flight 455 killing all 73 people aboard, including 24 members of the Cuban fencing team
1983	El Salvador	1	José Larios Guerra, former president of the Salvadoran Olympic Committee and retired Army Colonel, is assassinated by gunmen with suspected ties to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
1986	Netherlands	0	'Into the Blue Commando of the Revolutionary Cells' claims responsibility for bombing the headquarters of the 1992 candidature committee in Amsterdam in protest against Amsterdam's bid for the 1992 Olympics
1987	Israel	0	Tear gas assault on Jewish Olympic Games celebration
1987	South Korea	115	Korean Air flight 858 explodes in mid-air upon the detonation of a bomb planted by North Korean agents
1992	Spain	0	Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) is suspected in an arson attack on a hotel near the Olympic village two months before the 1992 Barcelona Olympics
1992	Spain	0	The Grupo de Resistencia Antifascista Primo Octubre (GRAPO) bombs a gas pipeline in Catalonia the day before the opening ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics
1996	Colombia	1	A Russian Olympic cyclist is kidnapped and killed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The cyclist was on a transcontinental bike tour towards the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games. His body was found a year later near the Panama border
1996	United States	2	Eric Rudolph bombs Atlanta's Centennial Park during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, killing two and injuring more than 110 others
1997	Greece	0	The Greek Olympic Committee is bombed by members of the Anti-Authority Group
2004	Greece	0	A group using the names of the mascots of the 2000 Athens Olympics, Phevos and Athena, claims responsibility for fire-bombing two Environment Ministry trucks during IOC meetings in Athens
2005	Spain	0	ETA claims responsibility for a car bomb attack outside the Pieneta track and field complex used to promote Madrid's bid to host the 2012 Olympics. The attack comes less than two weeks before Madrid's bid to host the Games
2006	Iraq	3 (at least)	The President of Iraq's Olympic Committee, Ahmed al-Hejea, its Secretary-General, Amr Abdel Jabbar, the head of Iraq's taekwondo federation, Jamal Abdel Karim, the head of water sports, Saeb al-Hakim, and dozens of other officials and athletes are abducted in a series of kidnappings between July and December 2006. An unspecified number of victims are killed or remain missing
2008	China	0	An improvised explosive device is found in Beijing's Qinhuaungdao Stadium where the Olympic football matches are to be held
2008	China	2	A knife-wielding assailant murders an American businessman and injures his wife and their tour guide. Their son-in-law was the coach of the US men's volleyball team
2008	China	3	Two bombs explode on Chinese buses in Kunming, Yunnan province, less than three weeks before the Beijing Olympics. The Turkistan Islamic Party claims responsibility for the bombings but Chinese authorities reject this claim

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

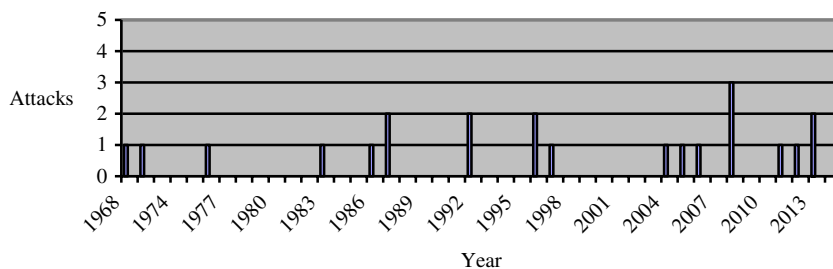
Year	Country	Fatalities	Description
2011	Pakistan	1	Unknown gunmen kill Abrar Hussain, three-time Olympic boxer and Deputy Director of the Pakistan Sports Board, as he leaves the Ayub Stadium in Quetta
2012	Libya	0	Assailants kidnap the President of Libya's Olympic Committee, Nabil al-Alam, in Tripoli. He is later released
2013	Russia	19	A suicide bomber detonates at a train station in Volgograd. Vilayat Dagestan claims responsibility for the attack, framing it as a warning ahead of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics
2013	Russia	17	A suicide bomber detonates on a trolley bus in Volgograd. Vilayat Dagestan claims responsibility for the attack

operatives who then swallowed cyanide capsules (although only one actually died). The attack killed all 115 people on board. It appears that North Korea had wanted to destabilize the South Korean government, disrupt its upcoming parliamentary elections and frighten international teams from attending the 1988 Seoul Olympics.⁵³

These two acts of state terrorism collectively killed at least 215 people, more than one and a half times as many as all other attacks combined (139 casualties).⁵⁴ Fatal Olympic-related terrorist attacks are rare, indicative of which is that nine attacks, or 40 per cent, produced no casualties; yet, state terrorism tends to be far more lethal than non-state terrorism. With regard to the latter, four attacks that stand out in terms of their high fatality rates are: the bombing of Cubana flight 455 in 1976 (73 casualties); the attack on the Israeli team during the 1972 Munich Olympics (17 casualties, including five perpetrators) and the two suicide bombings in Russia in 2013 (19 and 17 fatalities, respectively, including two perpetrators).

Thirdly, while the Olympic Games are a mega-event that offers terrorists a global stage for communicating their political causes, terrorist actors who target the Games are typically grounded in particular localized sociopolitical contexts.⁵⁵ This is evident, for instance, in the attacks in Spain by anti-fascist and nationalist/separatist groups, in Russia by nationalist/separatists and Islamist extremists, and in the United States by a pro-life activist opposing US government policy on abortion. These examples indicate that terrorist activity around the Olympics has involved myriad forms and is characterized by the ideological diversity of the actors implicated in the attacks.⁵⁶ This finding is consistent with historical research which shows that terrorism exists only in a cultural and historical context.⁵⁷

Finally, Figure 1 shows that there is no consistent change in the frequency of Olympic-related terrorism over time. While Figure 1 indicates a clustering of attacks in the period 2004–2013, it should be stressed here that Olympic-related attacks are atypical events that heavily influence fatality and temporal trend statistics. We should therefore

**Figure 1.** Olympic-related terrorist attacks, 1968–2014.

exercise caution when seeking to establish patterns in Olympic-related terrorism over time. Olympic-related terrorist attacks can be considered ‘black swan’ events: low-probability and high-consequence events that are difficult to pattern, predict or prevent. According to risk engineering scholar Nassim Nicholas Taleb, a black swan event has three attributes: it lies outside the realm of regular expectations; it carries an extreme impact; and, despite its outlier status, retrospective explanations are created for its occurrence, seemingly making the event explainable and predictable.⁵⁸ In this context, there appears to have been a semiotic shift in security and risk governance which links into the cultural dimensions of living with low-probability, high-consequence events after 9/11.⁵⁹ As will be shown later in this paper, the Olympics are one site where authorities seek to construct and manage the risk of terrorism through highly dramatized security displays. Rather than mere retrospective predictability, security governance at the Olympics and other major sports events involves prospective risk management aimed at pre-empting and minimizing the probability of terrorism.⁶⁰ This issue has received significant scholarly attention in recent years. It is to the growing body of research on the intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics that the paper now turns.

Contemporary Research Agendas

A growing body of scholarly research examines various aspects of the intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics. These studies stem from a range of disciplines and fields of study and draw on different epistemological, ontological and theoretical perspectives. Within this literature, a number of established and emerging themes can be distinguished.

Media Representations of Terrorism at the Olympics

Media discourses about terrorism and security at the Olympics have been occupying scholars for well over a decade. This research highlights how such media discourses are tied to, and products of, broader geo-political ideologies. Thus, sociologists Michael Atkinson and Kevin Young have critiqued how media coverage of the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, the first post-9/11 Olympics, became an integrated media campaign to align particular ideas about global insiders and outsiders in the ‘war on terror’.⁶¹ Their more recent work shows the mediated construction of the Olympics as political war zones.⁶² Their comparison of the 2002 Salt Lake City Games with subsequent Games suggests an important trend in media representation of terrorism and security at the Olympics:

Whereas the mediation of terror at the Salt Lake City Games contained a relative balance of the selling of fear and the assurance of security through highly descriptive accounts, today what seems to be more commonplace is the simple reminder that everyone should be fearful of every possible threat, contingency and instance of violence imaginable.⁶³

Other studies have arrived at similar conclusions.⁶⁴ In their analysis of Australian media reporting on terrorism and sport during the period 1996–2001, sport management scholars Kristine Toohey and Tracy Taylor found that the media coverage created ‘hegemonic tropes’ that reinforced the government’s counter-terrorism policy, fuelled public fears about terrorism, and portrayed sport as a signifier of defiance against terrorism and its attempts to strike at the western way of life.⁶⁵ A recent study by media and communication

scholars Moran Yarchi, Ilan Tamir and Yair Galily focuses on international media coverage of the authorities' reaction to terrorist attacks or threats targeting sports events, including the Olympics.⁶⁶ Similar to Toohey and Taylor, they found that the international media generally expressed uncritical support for the authorities and their counter-terrorism actions. As such, the media acted as a unifying arena and rallied around the political actors facing the challenge of terrorism.⁶⁷

Public Perceptions of Terrorism and Security

A related research theme is spectators' and public perceptions of terrorist threats at the Olympics. Kristine Toohey's work on the risk perceptions of 2004 Athens Olympic Games attendees is groundbreaking in this regard.⁶⁸ Toohey shows that while the majority of attendees displayed tenets of risk aversion and engagement with a discourse of fear, and took for granted the increased security measures, they did not consider terrorism to be a major deterrent or threat to their safety during the Games. Moreover, some spectators were committed not to let the risk of terrorism overshadow their enjoyment of the Olympics, displaying resilience, resistance and indifference to potential terrorist threats.⁶⁹ Toohey uncovered a range of emotional responses to terrorism threats including both fear- and anger-related attitudes. Gender was an important factor influencing attendees' perceptions, with women's comments being more fear-related and indicating higher perceived risk, while men's comments were more likely to be associated with optimism and lower perceived risk.⁷⁰

Toohey and Taylor's work suggests that the risk aversion that pervades Olympic security operations and, more specifically, what Olympic organizers fear will or might happen, is at odds with attendees' constructions of risk and fear.⁷¹ This disconnect also comes to the fore in recent studies that explore the perceptions and planning of event organizers.⁷² Toohey and Taylor point to the prospect of government and Olympic organizers overreacting and amplifying the risk, and raise the need to work towards ensuring that spectators have a positive and safe experience.⁷³ Recent research has extended these insights into a full-blown critical socio-historical analysis of security and surveillance at the Olympics, as discussed below.

Security, Surveillance and its Consequences

One of the challenges Olympic organizers face is the need to balance the requirements of security and public safety with the festive and convivial nature of the Games. In a review of Olympic security operations during the period 1972–1994, Guy Sanan writes that 'Olympic security operations not only occur in a democratic context where civil liberties and rights have to be strictly respected, but they also cannot spoil the joyous festival atmosphere, which is so special to the Olympic Games'.⁷⁴ Sanan notes that Olympic security should be both comprehensive and unobtrusive, and posits this as one of the defining characteristics of Olympic security.⁷⁵

International research shows that in the twenty-first century this 'defining characteristic' has receded well into the background as progressive securitization and expanding notions of risk have taken hold. Historical studies document the lasting impact of the 1972 Munich Olympics terrorist attack on the Olympic movement's security considerations and planning.⁷⁶ The 1976 Montreal Summer Games constituted a turning point in Olympic history as the Games' first highly visible security operation.⁷⁷ According to historical

sociologist Dominique Clément, the Montreal Olympics laid the foundation and set a precedent for high security investment that has since become the standard for the Olympics, in spite of being 'based largely on imagined threats'.⁷⁸ Clément further shows that the Montreal Olympics had long-term implications for Canadian law enforcement as the security operation produced new resources and inter-agency links that were only made possible as a result of hosting the Games.

A series of critical investigations carried out in the past decade show the broader applicability and implications of the issues raised by Clément. This nascent field demonstrates the central role of security in Olympic planning and, more specifically, the pervasive aspirations of securitization and the ever increasing range of surveillance and control measures. This broad shift towards a 'total security' model has been examined from a range of disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives. Lack of space prevents a discussion of the full breadth and depth of this work here. Instead, it is possible to identify at least three areas of consensus from this recent literature.

Firstly, Olympic security planning has become increasingly standardized across time and space since the 1976 Montreal Olympics.⁷⁹ The generation of post-9/11 uncertainties has further escalated the scale, intensity and scope of Olympic security practices, which both express and extend contemporary developments in global security governance. The Olympics are discursively constructed as 'spaces of exception' wherein aggressive security and surveillance measures are justified to mitigate and prevent any potential or actual security risks.⁸⁰ As such, the Olympics, like other major sports events, serve as an opportunity for the authorities to introduce security measures that would be more difficult to justify in normal circumstances.⁸¹ Yet, the convergence and transferability of Olympic security strategies across time and place impacts unevenly on their hosts as they are mediated by localized conditions and processes, such as local security vernaculars and the scale of existing security infrastructures.⁸²

Secondly, a combination of factors drives the global standardization of Olympic security. The governance asserted by the IOC as a knowledge broker is particularly noteworthy in this regard.⁸³ Broader processes of transnational and multi-agency collaboration and knowledge transfer are also centrally implicated in this process. Crucially, these processes transcend public/private and civilian/military boundaries. Research shows the proliferating range and scale of transnational collaborations and networks in security governance at the Olympics, which include a range of private sector actors such as security consultancy and technology companies.⁸⁴ Interactions between these actors, which include regular expert conferences, knowledge exchange programmes and test events, not only serve to institutionalize Olympic security discourses and practices, but also provide a space of experimentation to develop, refine and rehearse (the integration of) surveillance and control technologies.⁸⁵

Thirdly, it is broadly agreed that Olympic security arrangements can endure long after the event is over. Post-event security legacies are now a strategic issue in Olympic security planning.⁸⁶ Security legacy has evolved into an explicitly articulated component of the Olympic business plan 'intended from the outset to capitalize on an opportune moment' in order to accelerate the expansion of security capabilities and surveillance infrastructures.⁸⁷ The intended and unanticipated security legacies are multifaceted. In addition to technological, informational and knowledge legacies, they include the endurance of attitudes about security and surveillance whereby the Olympic 'state of exception' can become normalized.⁸⁸ Another major security legacy is the reconfiguration of the physical environment both during and after the

Olympics, with the Games acting as a catalyst for the re-making of urban security and socio-spatial architectures.⁸⁹ Examples include urban clearing programmes (e.g. forced relocations) and efforts to cleanse or civilize urban space through intense regulation and control.⁹⁰ These issues raise critical concern regarding social polarization, inequality and civil liberties. Recent research highlights the potential for the Olympics to exacerbate social inequalities and undercut democratic principles and practices in the name of keeping the Games safe,⁹¹ the decline of local control over urban environments in Olympic cities,⁹² and the risk of function creep,⁹³ among other issues. At the same time, the Olympics can have the unanticipated legacy of revitalizing and mobilizing activist networks which seek to resist the securitization of the public sphere and create spaces of dissent within and beyond Olympic events.⁹⁴

Conclusion

This study has set out to examine the historical and contemporary intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics. The paper indicates the need to bring state terrorism into the analysis of terrorism at the Olympics. The empirical data presented in this paper underline the significance of state terrorism in this context: the two deadliest terrorist attacks in the history of the modern Olympic Games were perpetrated or sponsored by representatives of the state against civilians. This finding should be viewed within its broader social and historical context; namely, that throughout history state terrorism has taken a vastly higher death toll than its non-state equivalent. The data further show the spatial and temporal displacement of attacks, with the bulk of attacks taking place outside of Olympic competitions and away from host cities, as well as the diverse ideological and cultural contexts of the violence.

The diverse body of research surveyed in this paper indicates that rather than taking the nature, causes and subjectivities of terrorism as the primary locus of investigation, the recent literature focuses on external representations of, and responses to, terrorism. An emerging field of critical research is concerned with security and surveillance at the Olympics. This research opens up new lines of inquiry by drawing critical attention to both intended and unanticipated security legacies of the Olympics, including the wider social implications of Olympic security operations. In so doing, it paves the way for future critical work on the intersections of terrorism, security and the Olympics.

An important policy implication of this historical and sociological research concerns what historians Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin describe as the need to avoid fuelling terrorism while claiming to fight it.⁹⁵ Olympic history offers some lessons here. Terrorism at the Olympics is not a new phenomenon and is not confined to a particular ideology, such as radical Islamism. Yet, the extent to which terrorist activity has targeted the Olympics in the past is rather limited. At the same time, Olympic security operations have evolved from a relatively low-key approach to an expansive security regime in which protection from terrorism is a key security concern for local organizing committees and dealt with as such. This security regime, which generally developed since the 1972 Munich Olympics and the 1976 Montreal Olympics and whose development accelerated since 9/11, has become increasingly standardized and globalized. The recent scholarship on the security legacies of the Olympics, which have become increasingly normalized, foregrounds this development and illustrates some of the tensions that exist between liberal democracy and

counterterrorism. Here, as in counterterrorism more broadly,⁹⁶ a key question is how the securitization of, and response to, terrorism can be balanced with democratic principles and respect for human rights and civil liberties.

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