

# London Olympics terror threat used to vastly increase surveillance powers

**Marcus Morgan****3 May 2008**

The threat of terrorism at the 2012 London Olympics is being hyped up in order to justify a vast increase in the surveillance powers of the British state.

According to a memo leaked to the *Daily Telegraph*, Home Office officials are planning to expand the police DNA database to identify suspects and use greater powers to track individuals through advanced closed circuit television (CCTV) technology and the Oyster card used by millions of people on London's bus and rail network.

The memo discusses different means the government could use to persuade the British public to accept these measures. It asks, "To what extent should the expectation of liberty be eroded by legitimate intrusions in the interests of security of the wider public?" and concludes, "Increasing [public] support could be possible through the piloting of certain approaches in high-profile ways such as the London Olympics."

To that end, ministers, police chiefs and officials have stepped up their demands for more security measures, utilising the Games. Last month, Lord Dear, the former Scotland Yard head of operations, made a public announcement expressing his doubts over present police capabilities to deal with the event. He said that the police force is too short of manpower to deal with the extra security needed and likened it to a "Sixties car in the 21st century," adding, "If the model is flawed now, it will certainly be flawed in four years' time."

"It's fairly obvious to anyone that major terrorist groups will not be particularly interested in attacking the Beijing Olympics," Dear said. "But in four years' time they will have the London Olympics as a target and we need to be best positioned to counter that well in time."

Dear's announcement was made despite the fact that there are a record 140,000 police officers in service and

the Olympics security budget has risen sharply by £238 million in the last few months. At the end of last year, Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell released figures that showed that the initial security budget of £200 million in 2005 had spiralled to more than £1 billion.

Dear's comments reflect those of the most senior officers in the police. The head of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Ian Blair, has also expressed concern over existing security arrangements and outlined a plan for them to be beefed up in readiness for the games. He has also said that special security and training will be required for athletes and the 200 heads of state expected for the opening ceremony. These proposals will inevitably involve extending the budget still further.

As well as increasing the number of police, the proposed scheme involves an elaborate and sophisticated security system spanning the whole of London. According to a BBC report last month, the Metropolitan Police Service wants to pool its 10,000 existing cameras with the thousands of traffic and congestion cameras already in operation across the city.

This would give the police control over a vast network of up to half a million CCTV cameras, making it the largest of its kind in the world. The network would then be controlled by a central £100 million bomb-proof command bunker operated jointly by the military, police and intelligence services brought together under the umbrella of the Olympic Security Directorate.

The Olympic security coordinator, Assistant Police Commissioner Tarique Ghaffur, has made several statements over the last few weeks that indicate just how huge the increase in surveillance will be. Speaking at an international security conference in Abu Dhabi, Ghaffur outlined new ticketing technology to be used

on the London transport system to track the movements of every individual, as well as “second-generation” computer technology that can track individuals through face recognition. The computers can use identity-recognition techniques to compare video against a database of digital faces.

A pilot scheme involving 750,000 mugshots has already been completed. Using the facial-mapping software connected to the CCTV cameras, an alert will flash up as soon as a known person appears on the screen. He added, “We will have the most secure and transparent ticketing system. Tracking technology is being developed—a spectator will be tracked from the venue to his or her home with these tickets.”

Other measures outlined by Ghaffur include dividing London into three security zones, three extra helicopters to carry out close surveillance, an increase in the automatic vehicle number plate recognition system, and checks using biometric fingerprints on the 50,000 workforce being used to build the venues.

Currently, the police can only check fingerprints and photographs from suspects after they have been arrested. Under these new powers, the police will be able to carry out these checks instantly with hand-held devices that are connected to the security database. Peter Neyroud, the chief executive of the National Policing Improvement Agency, said, “We are trying to get a really disciplined understanding of how to use these tools before the Olympics. That is a really important time scale for us.”

As well as increasing the size of the British police force to 9,000 for the major Olympic events, there are also proposals to draft in extra manpower from private security firms and foreign armed police. Scotland Yard has called for these measures on the basis that too few British police have firearms training to cope with the events, and the costs of training them are prohibitive. The contracted armed police will be used to guard dignitaries, athletes, the main Olympic Park and other sports venues.

Ian Blair told a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority, “The principle must be that we don’t want armed foreign police, but there’s a ‘but’—and the ‘but’ is twofold. One, you may not be able to get any foreign police unless they are armed, because they won’t feel easy being unarmed in public scenarios like that. Two, do we actually have, in this case, sufficient capacity to

have enough armed officers to do the job?”

All of these extra resources will mean that the security budget for the games will mushroom in the next four years. Denis Oswald, the chairman of the International Olympic Committee’s London 2012 coordination commission, has admitted that it is “impossible to predict” how much money will need to be spent when the games are still four years away. He said, “It’s a very difficult area but if we want to have occasions like the Olympic Games, where hundreds of thousands of people meet, then you have to make sure they are safe, otherwise you just give up and the terrorists will win.”

This refusal to draw up a fixed budget on the basis of a terrorist threat that is “impossible to measure” amounts to a blank cheque that Londoners and the British people will ultimately have to pay. More importantly, the machinery is being created that is necessary to impose a highly integrated police/military apparatus in Britain’s capital city, under the pretext of keeping the country safe from terrorism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**