

Security conference for London Olympics plans massive police operation

Paul Stuart
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On January 25, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), in partnership with the Home Office, held a conference on security for the upcoming Olympic Games in London.

As well as representatives of the Olympic Security Directorate, it brought together senior political and military figures, corporate sponsors and security agencies.

As the £9.3 billion event approaches, the security bill is rapidly approaching £1 billion. Escalating security measures are designed to reassure the financial and political elite, who demand a safe location to indulge in every luxury. As economic turmoil escalates, London's reputation as a financial centre and a home to the international super-rich has become tied to the games.

The security operation will begin when the Olympic flame arrives in Lands End, Cornwall, and will finish after the closing ceremony of the Para-Olympic games, approximately three months later. For this period, up to 23,700 security guards (including 3,000 unpaid volunteers) will be provided by G4S. They will join 13,500 military personnel, a larger force than the 10,000 British soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, and almost 12,000 police, as many as were deployed in last August's rioting.

The majority of the intelligence services, the elite SAS, and detachments from the Navy and Air Force will be on full alert in what has become the largest peacetime security operation in British history.

All these figures are almost double original estimates. And this does not include all the other security personnel deployed by other countries and sponsors of the games.

The pretext for this massive display of force is the threat of a terrorist attack. But the RUSI conference made clear that the real concern is the development of domestic opposition in response to the government's

austerity measures.

In her speech, Conservative Home Secretary Theresa May described how her department recently had to combat a new emerging threat from "encampment protests," and other forms of public disorder that could disrupt the games.

May reiterated that the Olympic security operation is "police-led", yet the RUSI conference was dominated by the military top brass. Attending were Air-Vice Marshal Clive Bairsto, the Director of Integration and Readiness Government Olympic Executive; General Sir Nick Parker, Commander Land Forces at the Ministry of Defence; Colonel Chris Scott, head of Olympic Safety and Security Testing and Exercising Team Olympic Security Directorate; and Air Chief Marshall Sir Brian Burridge; Vice President Strategic Marketing Finmeccanica UK Ltd.

"The police-led multi-agency National Olympic coordination centre is now up and running," May said. "Led by assistant commissioner Chris Allison, this unique facility will have a national overview of how the Olympic security operation is working. And we have also put in place a specific intelligence capability in advance of the games to allow us to identify and disrupt threat... The Olympic intelligence centre is now producing and disseminating national Olympic threat assessments."

May's intent is to suppress any protest that reveals the immense social tensions within British society. With an air of triumph she remarked, "We have recently clarified and strengthened our policy on encampment-style protests inside Olympic venues," adding that equipment used to establish such protests, such as tents, will be banned. Games security and police will respond robustly to any attempted encampment, using all available powers to "remove

encampments and equipment.”

A Parliament Square protest was forcibly removed by police on January 16 based on a new law banning tents and structures around Parliament and other areas in London. The Occupy London protest at St. Paul’s Cathedral also faces eviction, as demanded by the City of London Corporation, supported by the government.

May concluded her remarks by congratulating the January 19 joint exercise on the River Thames between the Metropolitan Police’s marine policing unit and the Royal Marines.

“Operation Woolwich and Arsenal Pier” is only one of the military-police exercises underway. It received glowing reports in the *Daily Mail*, the *Sun* and the *London Evening Standard*, with page after page full of photographs of the firepower on display, showing the “preparedness” of the military for any eventuality. This follows front-page treatment of SAS exercises in and around the Stratford, East London Olympic site late last year.

The *Daily Mail* led the charge, with “Armed, ready and waiting: Special Forces give a show of strength on the Thames ahead of mammoth Olympic test of British security.” It wrote of “British muscle on show” as a “glimpse of the sheer scale of the country’s biggest peacetime security operation... Operation Woolwich Arsenal Pier saw the Royal Marines and Scotland Yard take command of the River Thames in a determined show of strength.”

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) web site said the Royal Marine 539 Assault Squadron was deployed, using “offshore raiding craft” and “Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel” assisted by a Royal Navy Lynx helicopter and a patrol boat HMS Blazer. Also deployed were a Metropolitan Police Force Firearms Unit, an Air Support Unit and officers from the Marine Policing Unit.

After the exercise Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond declared, “As we get closer to the Games, the public can expect to see more exercises like this.”

From January 24 to 26, the skies over North Yorkshire were dominated by a Royal Air Force (RAF) and Royal Navy joint operation dubbed “Exercise Taurus Mountain 1”. According to the MOD, this “familiarisation drill” involved two Typhoon jets, two Puma helicopters, two Lynx helicopters, one Sea King

Airborne Surveillance and Control helicopter, two Grob Tutor aircraft and one Sentry E-3D aircraft. The aircraft were mobilised from RAF bases all over the country. Wing Commander Paul Godfrey stated that the Typhoon Force included many that “have recently returned from combat operations over Libya”.

Typhoon aircraft will also operate out of London’s RAF Northolt base, close by Gatwick Airport. Locals have reported huge booming noises in the air in the district, so loud they thought a war had started.

HMS Ocean will be stationed on the Thames near Greenwich, where attack helicopters will be based. HMS Ocean is the largest ship in the Royal Navy. It can hold 850 Royal Marines, 40 vehicles and up to 18 helicopters. In May 2011 the ship was deployed with attack helicopters as part of the assault on Libya.

HMS Bulwark will be stationed in Weymouth Bay, Dorset, near the Olympic water-based events. Surface to air missiles will be situated all around London.

A major full-scale exercise on the Thames is being prepared for May.

The trade unions are silent on the military deployments and are instead busy signing corporatist deals to ensure workers are made available for duty during the Olympics. Labour Party spokesmen agree with the troop deployment, with the only reservation expressed that it may adversely affect military deployments elsewhere.

A financial and political elite that has no democratic mandate to rule is imposing deeply unpopular austerity measures that are causing hardship for the vast majority. They are leaning ever more on state forces to enforce them.

The agenda for the RUSI conference described the Olympics as an event that “will highlight how the UK could capitalise on a successful games to strengthen national security”.

Session four was devoted to exploring how valuable lessons from the games “can be incorporated and exploited to refine the UK’s national security infrastructure of the future.”



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