

London Olympic missile sites confirmed despite protests

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The government has confirmed the locations of ground-based air defence missiles across London during the Olympic Games. The weapons will be installed in the next fortnight. The announcement follows protests in east London against the deployment last weekend and preempts a legal challenge next week against the weapon deployment.

Two types of air defence missile will be located across a metropolitan area that is home to around 13 million people. High Velocity Missiles (HVMs), which travel at three times the speed of sound, are “designed to counter threats from very high performance low-flying aircraft”, according to the military. Rapier missiles provide limited-area defence cover against fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAVs) and cruise missiles.

Speaking after a major security exercise this April, standing Joint Commander General Sir Nick Parker spoke of “an air threat ... categorised in two ways, the sort of 9/11 threat everyone knows about, and also ... the lower, slower type of target which might pop up closer to the Olympic Park, which we would need to intervene”.

News of the installation was first released two months ago, when residents of one east London building received notification of the move from the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The government has confirmed location of the missiles at the six sites identified at that time.

Rapiers are to be located at Blackheath Common, Blackheath, Oxleas Common, Shooters Hill (both in the south east), William Girling Reservoir, Enfield

(northeast London) and Barn Hill, Netherhouse Farm, Epping Forest (in the east).

HVMs are to be located in two residential areas in the east of the city: Lexington Building, Fairfield Road, Bow, Tower Hamlets (one of the most densely populated inner city boroughs), and Fred Wigg Tower, Montague Road Estate, Waltham Forest.

The government has reserved any announcement on whether the missiles will remain in place for the Paralympic Games, which follow the Olympics.

Since the missile sites were first revealed, there has been widespread opposition. Residents of Fred Wigg Tower have launched a legal challenge that is due to be heard next week. More than 1,000 people have already signed a petition against siting the missiles at the Bow site. Last Saturday, demonstrators marched to the Lexington Building.

The government’s announcement clearly indicates their determination to press ahead with the militarisation of the capital in the face of any opposition. The Olympics will see an unprecedented military deployment. Fighter jets will be stationed at RAF Northolt, in west London, for the first time since the Second World War. A helicopter carrier will be deployed on the Thames, with RAF and Navy sniper teams on standby. Puma helicopters will be based in Ilford, east London. Naval vessels will be stationed along the south coast, where the Olympic sailing events will take place. Around 13,500 military personnel will be deployed, 4,000 more than the British currently have stationed in Afghanistan.

Residents have noted the way democratic rights have been cast aside. David Putson, who lives near the south London sites, told the *Evening Standard*, “They have not answered any questions, they have just said we’re doing it—it’s a sad day for democracy.”

An MoD spokesman told the press, “The government has reserved the right to extend the airspace restrictions, and the deployment of military assets, including ground-based air defence.”

Praising the security plans, Defence Secretary Philip Hammond claimed that “broadly speaking, communities are supportive of our work.” He dismissed the objectors as “a small group of activists.”

The decision to site the missiles has been accompanied by a wholesale strengthening of the police and security services. Around 12,000 police officers will be deployed during the Games, and the Metropolitan Police have been stockpiling rubber bullets. The intelligence service MI6 is reported to have restricted all normal leave until after the Games, while the head of MI5, Jonathan Evans, told the press recently there is “no such thing as guaranteed security.”

Private security firms across London are clamping down on photography, with press photographers being prevented from taking pictures of the outside of the Olympic stadium.

In his media interview Jonathan Evans said, “The dog you haven’t seen may turn out to be the one that bites you.”

In the name of a defence against terrorism, these preparations are aimed at suppressing any form of domestic protest and civil unrest. According to the recent “Reading the Riots” report, prepared by the *Guardian* and the London School of Economics, police are expecting further civil unrest on the scale of last August’s riots. Many officers interviewed for the report pointed to the worsening social and economic conditions. Their concern is whether they will be able to control such unrest.

This barely disguised appeal for funding has met with

an enthusiastic response from the Tory right. London Mayor Boris Johnson said the report was “very helpful to all of us who want to campaign for higher police numbers.”

This is the background to Hammond’s comment that the Olympics security plan provides “both reassurance and a powerful deterrent.”

Protesters have been buoyed by some falsely optimistic comments. On Saturday, for example, protesters were told that the decision on the missile sites had been delayed. This, the Socialist Workers Party split-off *Counterfire* explained, was “due in large part to the efforts of the campaign”.

That was premature. The latest government announcement and Hammond’s dismissal of the protests give a more accurate indication of the current relationship of forces.



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