

The police state 2012 Olympics

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According to the International Olympic Committee, “The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”

This high-sounding boilerplate has long been at odds with the actual function of the Olympic Games, which have increasingly become a quadrennial celebration of nationalism, celebrity and corporate money-making. And never more so than the 2012 Olympics in London, which seem to have been deliberately staged by the host government to trample on notions of peace, human dignity and democratic rights.

The British government announced Thursday that it would mobilize an additional 3,500 troops for security duty at the Olympics, bringing the total number of soldiers, airmen and military police deployed for the event to a staggering 17,000, far more than are currently deployed in the imperialist war in Afghanistan.

The combined total of 49,000 uniformed personnel—17,000 troops, 12,000 police and 20,000 or more security guards—exceeds the size of the expeditionary force Britain contributed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is the largest single mobilization of British security forces since the Suez Crisis of 1956.

The target of this display of military force cannot be a handful of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists allegedly seeking to attack the showcase event, as the government of Prime Minister David Cameron claims. The scale of the mobilization is entirely disproportionate to the potential threat of Al Qaeda-linked groups, whose last significant attacks in Western Europe were the suicide bombings of mass transit in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005.

The British government is mobilizing more than three times as many regular troops as the Bush administration did in 2002 for the Winter Olympics at

Salt Lake City, Utah, which began only six months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and four months after the US invasion of Afghanistan.

The selection of weaponry belies the claim that small-scale or “lone-wolf” terrorism is the main concern. Why then patrol the skies over London with supersonic Typhoon fighter jets? Why deploy anti-aircraft missile batteries on rooftops in densely populated neighborhoods in east London, where the firing of heavy weapons is more likely to cause civilian casualties than any terrorist strike?

Why bring the largest ship in the British Navy, the carrier *HMS Ocean*, equipped with 40 attack helicopters firing rockets and heavy machine guns up the Thames? The last deployment for this warship was in the 2011 NATO attack on Libya.

Despite the nonstop barrage in the British and American media over the threat of terrorism, the police state atmosphere surrounding the London Olympics has far more to do with the increasingly tense state of class relations in Britain and the increasing resort by the imperialist powers to military violence around the world.

The Olympic Games are being held only a few miles from neighborhoods where mass rioting against police brutality and devastating poverty and unemployment erupted last August, after the police killing of an unarmed father of four. From Tottenham, rioting spread to cities throughout the country, with the Cameron government, the opposition Labour Party, and the corporate-controlled media all denying there was any social reason for the unrest. The official response to the rioting was massive repression and assembly-line prosecution of alleged rioters, who were summarily sentenced to long prison terms in court proceedings that made a travesty of justice.

Earlier this year, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that soldiers from the elite Third Battalion of the Parachute

Regiment, blooded by years of deployment in Northern Ireland and Afghanistan, were conducting training exercises in Kent for future riot situations in Britain, including potential flare-ups during the 2012 Olympics. The newspaper concluded: “Defence sources have confirmed that if violence were to return to British cities, especially during the Olympic Games, the Paras would be ‘ideally placed’ to provide ‘short-term’ support to police forces around the UK.”

The total bill for the 2012 Olympics is approaching 10 billion pounds—itself an insult to the British working class, which faces nonstop cuts in jobs, wages and social programs, including education, the National Health Service and old-age pensions. Of this staggering figure, at least half is categorized as “security-related,” including 1.1 billion pounds for the police alone, and 4.4 billion pounds for the military and intelligence services.

Cameron’s Home Secretary, Theresa May, in charge of internal policing, has boasted of creating a massive intelligence database and setting up a special center “now producing and disseminating national Olympic threat assessments.”

The “threats” are not so much of violence as of political opposition to the austerity policies of the British government. May said that security had been heightened against “encampment-style protests inside Olympic venues” and that police would respond swiftly to “remove encampments and equipment.” The Metropolitan Police, for example, have stockpiled tens of thousands of rubber bullets, compared to a supply of only 700 before last August’s riots.

Britain, like every other major capitalist power, has become increasingly unequal, with the richest one percent controlling nine percent of all income, triple their share of 35 years before. A financial and political elite with little popular support is implacably committed to an austerity program that is causing hardship for the vast majority of working people, and relying on state repression to safeguard its rule.

There is, as well, an international dimension to the militarization of the London Olympics. The British government served as a (very) junior partner of American imperialism in Iraq and Afghanistan, but along with France, has been seeking to assert greater weight in the plundering and exploitation of the former colonial countries. Britain and France led last year’s air

assault on Libya, and are at the forefront of the drive towards similar action against Syria. A display of British air and naval power, shown on worldwide television, sends a clear message both to immediate targets like Syria and Iran, as well as to their main sponsors, Russia and China.

As in nearly every instance of imperialist saberrattling, the United States is involved as well. As the *New York Times* noted Sunday, British security plans for the London Olympics “underwent a radical overhaul in December, in part, officials say, because of pressure from the United States in the form of warnings about vulnerability to terrorist attacks that came from a specialized team of FBI and CIA officials monitoring Olympic preparations.”

The display of militarism in London serves the political purposes of Washington. By once again raising the specter of “terrorism,” the attention lavished on the 2012 Olympics helps to prepare public opinion for new military adventures by American imperialism.

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