

Briefing Memo

The Olympics and Terrorism

Yoshio KATAYAMA

Head, Defense Policy Division

Policy Studies Department

It has been decided that the Tokyo Olympic Games and /Paralympic Games (hereinafter referred to as the Tokyo Olympics unless otherwise stated) will be held in 2020. The most important task is to ensure their safety. The Olympics have been attacked several times by terrorists in the past. Let us outline what kinds of risks there are and what counter-measures will be taken in the Tokyo Olympics.

Why do the Olympics, which should be festivals for peace, relate to terrorism? Terrorism is violence derived from political motives aimed to damage societies with fright and fear and is a sort of theatrical crime. The more crowds a game draws, the more favorable it is for terrorists. Big sports festivals including the Olympics attracting crowds (audiences and spectators) from all over the world become a suitable target for terrorists.

The Olympics tend to be considered a venue for enhancing national prestige, but they have been exploited politically many times, not just limited to terrorism. In the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, African-American athletes carried out an act of protest against racial discrimination in a commendation ceremony. In the United States, in the early days after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, which had made segregation completely illegal throughout the country, racial discrimination still remained and riots frequently occurred. The act of the protest was repeatedly televised through satellite TV broadcasting which had started spreading all over the world. Putting aside the pros and cons of the act of these African-American athletes, the event proved that if people caused a controversy in concert with the Olympics, their demands could be brought to the attention of the entire world.

In the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, a Palestinian group "Black September" stormed the Olympic Village and caused a tragedy, killing 11 hostages, 5 insurgents and one police officer. In hindsight, it is highly regrettable that the venue was not strictly guarded despite the fact that the Olympics had proven to be politically useful in the preceding Olympic Games in Mexico City and Palestinian terrorist activities such as hijackings had increased since the end of the 1960's. Since then the Olympics and anti-terrorist measures have become inseparable. In addition, it has had a more marked tendency to be influenced by politics.

In the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976, African nations boycotted the Games protesting the South Africa's apartheid policy. In the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980, European and North American nations boycotted in protest against the then USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, with Japan following them.

Conversely, in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, the U.S.'s invasion of Grenada caused a boycott by countries in the Communist bloc.

In 1987, the year preceding the Seoul Olympic Games, a Korean Airline aircraft exploded in the sky over the Andaman Sea with bombs planted by North Korean agents, crashing and killing a total of 115 people. The motive was reportedly to obstruct the Seoul Olympic Games. The whole international community including the Communist bloc, however, condemned North Korea, and the Seoul Olympic Games ironically became the first one with no boycotts in four Olympics. (North Korea did not participate in the Seoul Olympics)

In the Atlanta Olympic Games (1996), a public park near the venues was bombed in the midst of the Games, and two people were killed and more than 100 people were injured. The offender, arrested a year later, was a man opposed to homosexuality and abortion. Along the course of the Torch Relays for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, confusion resulted worldwide including in Japan around the Tibet issue. In the 2012 London Olympic Games, a threat suggesting the cutting power of the opening ceremony venue using a cyber-attack was sent, but no actual attack was made.

In 2013, buses and station buildings were successively blasted in Volgograd 600km away from Sochi where the Winter Olympic Games were to be held the next year and total of 41 people were killed and 120 people were injured. It was speculated that the purpose was to disturb the Games. However, the true motives are not clear because terrorist incidents related to ethnic conflicts have been notably frequent in the Russia. In any event, the country was put on full alert towards the Games.

Followings are examples of sports festivals other than the Olympics, which have been attacked. In 1996, bombs, probably set by "Irish Republican Army (IRA)" which demanded Ireland's unification, exploded in Manchester on the day before the European Football Championship and 200 people were injured. On the day of the European Football League games in 2002, bombs, reported to have been set by the Basque separatist group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), exploded in Madrid, injuring 17 people. In 2008, bombs exploded on a marathon course in a suburb of Colombo, where 15 people were killed and 100 people were injured, probably caused by "Liberation Tiger for Tamil Eelam (LTTE)" which aimed to establish a Tamil nation independent from Sri Lanka. In 2009, the Sri Lankan cricket team bus was attacked in Lahore, Pakistan by insurgents armed with guns and bombs, who killed eight people and injured six. Moreover, in 2010, during the airing of the World Cup Soccer games from South Africa, three areas for eating and drinking in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, were blown up, killing over 50 people. It is thought that the Islamic extremist group "Al-Shabaab" was probably responsible. Furthermore, bombs set by two Chechen brothers exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon in 2013, killing three people and injuring 300. The offenders shot one University's guard while running away. Citizens were forced to evacuate inside buildings, public transportation including subways, buses and aircraft was stopped, and various events also had to be canceled.

As stated above, the Olympics and big sports events have been targets of terrorism. The Olympics environment is different from that of a summit meeting where leaders of the major powers gather

behind closed doors for a short term. The Olympics involve spectators. Long term precautions are required in order to guard dispersed VIPs, a large number of spectators and the general public. In addition, terrorism is not limited to a direct attack on athletic facilities.

Once decided, however, every effort should be taken to ensure the safety of the Tokyo Olympics. What kinds of dangers would then be expected in concrete terms? A large city such as Tokyo where populations and functions are extremely concentrated is inherently vulnerable to terrorism. So called lifelines including water, energy, transportation and communications are essential to maintain citizens' daily lives, which would incur large scale impacts if even one of them were damaged. Vast underground spaces and skyscrapers are effective at accommodating a large number of people within limited areas, however the situation would change completely if some lifeline functions ceased. If electric power to a high-rise building stopped, water (toilets accordingly), bath and floor heating (excluding gas ranges), let alone electric appliances, would become unavailable. In addition, neither elevators nor auto-doors could function, resulting in not only being shut out but, in the case of elevators, also confined for a long time. In exchange for convenience in their everyday lives, people in a large city are surrounded by potential risks.

Add to this, the Olympics provide extraordinary situations. In the area of mass disasters, a large number of people (generally, more than 1000 persons) who gather for the same purpose, for a fixed period in a limited space, is called a "Mass Gathering". While this includes public transportation and commercial complexes, the Olympic Games are per se an "emergency" from the standpoint of out-of-the-ordinary crowds wrapped in an uplifting atmosphere. Though unlike football matches, there may not be hooligans in the Olympics crowd, a tremendous hustle and bustle would be expected. Moreover, the Tokyo Olympics will be conducted in fierce heat.

Counter measures against terrorism should be taken under the above-mentioned circumstances. In the beginning of the 2000's, men who seemed to have relations with al-Qaeda had frequently entered and left Japan, and the organization sent some threatening statements to Japan. However no concrete incidents have occurred. Bombers, who were responsible for the simultaneous explosions in a bus and subway in 2005 in London, committed the crime protesting the U.K's participation in the Iraq War, whereas Japan in the 70 years since the end of the World War II has killed no one abroad through the use of force. In the reconstruction assistance activities in Iraq, Japan's assistance units built up good relations with the local people in Iraq. Foreign Muslim residents in Japan have come to the country each with their own purpose, earnestly striving in study and business. Japan has no reason to incur the enmity of Muslims. Accordingly, there is little probability for Japan to be targeted by Islamic extremists.

Rather than that, caution must be taken toward a trend seen recently in advanced nations of lone wolves or small groups, who tend to cause terrorism. Examples of these incidents in Japan are shown as follows: the bomb plot targeting the Seibu Shinjuku line in 2007, the killing and wounding incident at Akihabara in 2008, the pen bomb explosion at Kasumi-Ga-Seki in 2014 and the gas cylinder explosions in Sapporo, 2014. In the backdrop of these affairs, there seems to be a vague discontent against society, not an ideology, (therefore it is questionable whether it can be called "terrorism" from an academic perspective).

However even a lone criminal caused massive casualty. It is difficult to discover lone criminals and hard to stop crimes before they happen.

In the next six years, it is predicted that the means of cyber-attack will become more advanced with sophisticated cyber technologizes (actually, we have no idea what kinds of methods for attack are being developed). As described before, in the London Olympic Games, a threatening message was sent saying the electric power of the opening ceremony venue would be cut off with cyber-attacks. Similarly, in the coming Tokyo Olympics, there are concerns over traffic control system obstruction, fake web sites and so on. Relevant ministries, agencies and enterprises have started making a concerted effort to prevent these obstructions.

Securing the safety of the marathon is the most troublesome issue compared with that of the other games and ceremonies. Unlike other venues where bags can be checked at entrances, it is difficult to check spectators along a marathon course. The course extends over a length of 40km. Crowds are very close to marathon runners; in the Athens Olympic Games (2004), a man burst onto the course and interfered with a runner. In the Tokyo Olympics, a large number of spectators who fall ill due to excessive heat will be transported by ambulances. What would happen if a terrorist attack occurred suddenly in this situation? The disastrous scene of the Boston Marathon event remains in our memory.

However, we can positively learn lessons from these events. The security status and emergency transportation and treatment methods for injures in Boston were examined in great detail. Since then domestic marathon events have been strictly guarded, and local people adjacent to the 2014 Tokyo Marathon course co-patrolled the course with the police. Coordination across multiple relevant agencies is essential for counter-terrorism measures at major events such as the Olympics. Seminars and drills have been frequently conducted together with the police and fire fighting authorities, local governments, medical agencies, corporations and the Self Defense Forces. In light of the experience in London, which is as large as Tokyo, preparations against terrorism are under way.

In Tokyo, the police exercises the leadership in setting up locally-oriented partnerships made up of administrative agencies, residents and corporations aimed toward the establishment of prevention and response systems against terrorism. These kinds of networks are planned to be utilized for disasters and are anticipated to be developed further after the Olympics. The promotion of locally-oriented partnerships is promising because the period of the Olympics is predetermined unlike unforeseeable disasters. If community development, which is robust to natural disasters and terrorism can spread across Japan, this would indeed be the Tokyo Olympics' most precious gift.

(Completed on June 2, 2014)

The views expressed in this article are of the author's own, not necessarily those of the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Japan Ministry of Defense.
All rights reserved. Contact information is available at the Planning & Management Division, Planning & Administration Department, NIDS. (URL): <http://www.nids.go.jp>