

Assessing Olympic terrorism threats

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The former Head of Department of Asymmetric Threats at the Joint Military Intelligence Division of Hellenic National Defense General Staff, in Athens, Greece, Ioannis Galatas suggests that the 2012 Olympic Games to be held in London in July and August represent a potential terrorist threat as the successor to the late Osama bin Laden and a medical doctor himself, struggles to regain "face" amongst extremists opposing the West.

There have been numerous [terrorist](#) attacks since New York's "9/11" but none quite matching its scale and impact. One might imagine that terrorist networks have not launched a subsequent attack with equally devastating effects and perhaps this has been a matter of disruption, [deterrence](#) and, most disturbingly, patience. However, Brigadier General Galatas (retired) suggests that such attacks have been thwarted by national [security measures](#) and intelligence. However, the threat of a CBRN, (pronounced C-burn) attack, referring to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear, is ever present and it might also be the wild card that the terrorist networks, and "Al Qaeda" in particular are holding back.

"It is possible that Al-Qaeda's success with the September 11 [attacks](#) has set the bar too high for its current CBRN capabilities. Al-Qaeda may be concerned that a CBRN attack that 'only' kills dozens of people would be perceived as a relative failure and demonstrate its weakened position relative to its pre-9/11 stature," he explains. Galatas adds that there is no indication that Al Qaeda has abandoned its pursuit of CBRN weapons, including so-called "dirty bombs". "The possibility of a patient Al Qaeda

is a disturbing possibility worth remembering," he adds.

Galatas' assessment of the terrorist threat during the forthcoming Olympic Games will be published in the *International Journal of Emergency Management*. He suggests that such an attack might potentially be directed directly against London, other Olympic cities, or unconnected locations. The latter possibility would come with the inherently loud message "we do not care about your people at all". An attack might also be covert or overt, be timed to occur before, during or after the Games for maximum terrorist propaganda effect.

Three previous Olympiads - Munich 1972, Atlanta 1996, Athens 2004 - have been the target of terrorism/extremism. There is no reason to assume that London is a planned target based on current intelligence and activities. Galatas suggests, however, that preparedness is vital before and after the Games. There are perhaps lessons to be learned about preparedness from the recent three-pronged natural disaster in Japan (2011). "Who could imagine a mega earthquake, a nuclear reactor meltdown and a tsunami in the same package? In that respect why should we consider a CBRN attack as science fiction?" Galatas points out.

More information: "2012 Olympic Games – terrorist CBRE threat estimate and medical response" in *Int. J. Emergency Management*, 2012, 8, 228-244

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