

# A View from the CT Foxhole: Richard Walton, Former Head, Counter Terrorism Command, London Metropolitan Police

By Paul Cruickshank

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**CTC: With the Paris Olympics starting in late July and the Euro 2024 soccer tournament being held in Germany from mid-June to mid-July, it is helpful to talk about lessons learned from safeguarding previous summers of sport. You were the head of SO15 Counter Terrorism Command at the time of the London Olympics and played a key role in protecting the Games. What were the challenges you faced as you prepared for those Games? What was the threat matrix?**

**Walton:** The threat matrix was quite different to what it is today. Just looking back, it was an interesting time because bin Ladin had been killed by U.S. Special Forces in 2011, but we still had in the U.K. various plots that we disrupted that were al-Qa`ida inspired, mostly using U.K. jihadists who had been out to the FATA region in Pakistan and been trained and come back and then started to plot attacks. We'd had a major disruption in the West Midlands in 2011 that subsequently resulted in seven convictions. The West Midlands plotters had been involved in quite a major 7/7-type planned attack using multiple suicide bombers.<sup>1</sup> That had been disrupted successfully. But we still found that some British jihadists were traveling out to FATA, so the most significant threat at that time was al-Qa`ida-inspired attacks. We didn't feel—and I think the historical record confirms this—that AQ had the capability at that time to dispatch large terrorist cells to the U.K. to carry out complex attacks. Hence, AQ was reliant on training U.K. nationals

in the FATA and sending them back to plot attacks from within the U.K.

You also had at that time, if you remember, Inspire magazine, which was very much AQ's propaganda machine and was very effective at inspiring British jihadists. I suppose our major concern was the threat from several thousand known Islamist extremist subjects of interest residing in the U.K., the vast majority of whom were British-born nationals who had been radicalized in the U.K. through magazines like Inspire, but also through engagement with the extremist organization called al-Muhajiroun, which was very active in the years leading up to 2012. Al-Muhajiroun was led by Anjem Choudary who was subsequently convicted in 2016 for inspiring and encouraging terrorist acts.<sup>a</sup>

We were also concerned about AQAP, the Arabian Peninsula AQ terrorist threat, which was mostly aviation threats linked to the experienced bomb maker Ibrahim al-Asiri. We disrupted in 2010 AQAP's printer cartridge plot. So, we were concerned about AQAP and the threat to aviation, and we were concerned about AQ-inspired attacks using British jihadists.

There was also some activity and operations linked to al-Shabaab. There were a small number of Somali diaspora in the U.K. who were funding al-Shabaab, and we ran various operations against them. Separately, ahead of the Olympics, we disrupted a plot by British jihadists to bomb an EDL [English Defence League] rally.<sup>2</sup> There were some convictions for that. Then just weeks before the Olympic Games, we disrupted another plot by Richard Dart and two others who were convicted of plotting an attack.<sup>3</sup> We never quite understood what that was about. We knew they were plotting, but we didn't quite know what their targets were going to be. But it was very, very close to the start of the Olympic Games, and so we were grateful to be able to disrupt that plot, too.

And then, of course, we had the threat from the extremist far right, and there was quite a febrile right-wing in the U.K. at the time: for instance, the English Defence League and the British National Party. Then you also had—as you always have—concerns about lone actors with one cause or another. The different ideologies: Environmental extremism was starting to take shape but was not seen as a terrorism concern as such. And there were different anarchist groups and left-wing extremists who we wanted to keep an eye on.

It's important to say that the threat level before, during, and just after the 2012 London Olympic Games never reached the level of 'severe,' an assessment meaning that an attack was 'highly likely.'

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a Editor's Note: After his release, Choudary was again arrested in July 2023. He has pleaded not guilty to two terror offenses relating to the banned group al-Muhajiroun. Jamie Grierson, Vikram Dodd, and Jason Rodrigues, "Anjem Choudary convicted of supporting Islamic State," *Guardian*, August 16, 2016; "Radical preacher Anjem Choudary pleads not guilty to two terror charges," BBC, March 25, 2024.

Throughout the period, it was ‘substantial’ in the U.K., which meant that an attack was ‘likely.’ We’d had a long period of the threat being at ‘severe,’ but the U.S. drone attacks against key prominent AQ leaders in the FATA had had a devastating impact on the AQ leadership who were massively disrupted but not defeated. The drone strategy reduced the threat substantially. So, there was a sense of optimism that the trajectory of the threat was going the right way and not the wrong way. This was, of course, completely reversed in 2014 with the emergence of the ISIS ‘caliphate.’

**CTC:** You have previously stated that ahead of London 2012, “at the heart of our effort was thinking through every conceivable attack scenario and implementing security plans to prevent or respond to them.”<sup>4</sup> What guided your approach for the London Games? What did London get right, and what were the lessons learned that can be helpful precepts for French authorities as they prepare to host the 2024 Games later this summer?

**Walton:** There are three key areas that are critically important to securing any major global sporting event when you have multiple venues, large crowds, huge numbers of spectators, and global media attention. The first is intelligence, and something that we’ve come to rely on over the years is the quality of intelligence and the ability to have that intelligence properly graded at source by several agencies simultaneously so that the intelligence is not sitting in many different locations and agencies but brought together, fused, analyzed, and then acted upon in fast time. This sounds easy to achieve, but it’s incredibly difficult to do.

Obviously, success in counterterrorism is defined by the absence of terrorism. For the Paris Olympics and Euro 2024, success will be a complete absence of terrorism anywhere in these countries. Any attack in France during the Games is an attack on the Games. That’s what we felt back in 2012: any attack in the U.K. during the time of the Games was an attack on the Games. This will be France’s biggest peacetime security policing challenge. It will be France’s biggest test of their new intelligence infrastructure since they reviewed it post-2015 after the Paris attacks. The French Parliamentary Commission in 2015/2016, following the attacks, came up with 40 recommendations, which were quite radical but identified big gaps in the intelligence infrastructure in France and the problem of isolated intelligence agencies coming to different conclusions based on fragments of intelligence.<sup>5</sup> The Commission didn’t conclude that the Paris 2015 attacks could have been prevented, but they came pretty close to saying that, and they certainly said that there were major deficiencies in how intelligence had been analyzed and how critically important intelligence had been in existence but was just left sitting in different agencies.

We’ve learned over the years, particularly through our work against Irish terrorist threats but also post the 7/7 London bombings where we came to the same conclusions, that you have to be more integrated with your intelligence infrastructure. You have to create fusion cells where you have operatives from all the different agencies sitting together in the same building, looking at the same screens, analyzing the same material. And if that’s not happening—and this will be the big test for France—intelligence falls between the cracks and is lost. And then you can’t make the correct analysis and act upon it. So a fusion of intelligence and intelligence agencies acting and networked together is probably the most important imperative for France ahead of the Olympics and for Germany for the Euros.



*Richard Walton*

You also have to make sure that interagency rivalries are extinguished because they always exist and there is a tendency for each agency to consider that they are the most important and significant one. But it’s important that everyone works together—it’s very hard to achieve, but it’s really important to band together. And then obviously you have your infrastructure. You have your tasking of informants, and you have the speed at which you act on that intelligence and how quickly you can disrupt when you’ve analyzed and come to the conclusion that you’ve got a problem. You’ve got to be able to act very, very fast, especially in real time when the Games is actually going on, when sports is actually happening. So, the intelligence component that I’ve been discussing is the most important component of delivering security.

The second most important component is to prepare, plan, test, and exercise every possible scenario, so that you have contingency plans in place for every possible risk that you can envisage facing—that is air, maritime threats, CBRN, cyber, etc.—possibly hundreds of contingency plans. We looked at and explored many different hypothetical scenarios: for instance, drone attacks inside the stadium, microlight attacks, glider attacks, helicopter attacks, aircraft attacks, fast boat attacks—you name it, we had thought it through. We were not always comfortable with the mitigation of those threats because they’re not always easy to mitigate, and particularly aerial and boat threats are very difficult to disable and also to even plan for. For instance, if you take drone threats, a lot of different militaries and private sector companies will present you with different options for disabling drones, neutralizing drones, catching drones, etc. But actually, when you put these to the test and you envisage it happening in a stadium full of 100,000 people, you realize that it may not be such a good idea to shoot a drone out of the sky in the middle of a stadium, risking injury or death of spectators by the collateral damage of the debris falling into the crowd. So there’s a lot to discuss and a great deal of scenario planning and ‘red teaming’ to get your mitigation right so that you know exactly what

your response will be to each risk.

The third component that's really, really important is the command and control. And obviously, you've got multiple agencies, not just police and intelligence agencies, but every other agency that's got a role in the Games, which will be every other agency that exists. Integrating these agencies into one complex C3, 'Command, Control and Communication,' system is very hard to do and requires extensive planning over many years. The planning for this will have started years ago when France bid for and won the Games in 2017. So, they've had plenty of time to prepare for this, but it's very difficult to get C3 systems working seamlessly. We had multiple bronze 'tactical' command centers at different venues and stadia with one overall silver and gold strategic operational command center with full visibility on everything.<sup>b</sup>

The French have had a lot of experience at this now. Since the Paris attacks in 2015, they've put in place a whole series of measures, which will be put to the test. They devised an action plan on terrorism in 2018,<sup>6</sup> which included new measures such as creating a prison intelligence infrastructure, which they didn't have before.<sup>c</sup> They also brought forward a national anti-terrorism prosecution service<sup>d</sup> and a national plan to prevent radicalization.<sup>7</sup> And, of critical importance, they created in June 2017 a National Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Coordination

(CNRLT) center<sup>e</sup> modeled on the Joint Terrorism Assessment Centre (JTAC) in the U.K.<sup>f</sup> to try and pull together the intelligence agencies dealing with terrorist intelligence. That will be severely tested. And the integration between the various agencies will be tested. France has a lot of different agencies with different and sometimes conflicting remits. Obviously, they will have learned from the 2015 experience with the Paris attacks, and there's been a lot of change in their structures. But the Games will be the biggest challenge to them ever really. And it will be a huge test of all these new infrastructures and systems.

**CTC: How do you see the threat matrix in the summer of 2024, as we go through these sporting championships in Germany and France? We have a war in Gaza, which is causing a lot of outrage in Muslim communities, and there's worry that jihadi terror groups will be able to exploit that for recruitment, press people forward to launch attacks. And with the Israeli and American teams and sports fans traveling to Paris, there's concern about threats from groups such as Hezbollah who have a track record of plotting and carrying out attacks in Europe and elsewhere.**

**Walton:** For me, the most serious threat facing the Games and the Euros is Islamic State Khorasan, which obviously has been in the ascendancy in the last couple of years. But more worryingly, it has recently been carrying out external terrorist operations in different countries with quite a high degree of success. They've plotted over 20 external attack operations in the past 15 months,<sup>8</sup> and there has been ISK-connected plots in at least 10 countries.<sup>9</sup>

We already know that Islamic State Khorasan is trying to orchestrate an attack on the Paris Olympics. On May 22, French police arrested an 18-year-old Chechen in Saint-Étienne for plotting an attack against the Paris Olympics football tournament. He was reportedly in contact with ISK operatives and, in liaison with them, plotted an attack on the Saint-Étienne stadium, one of the venues for the tournament.<sup>10</sup>

There is also concern ISK could attack Euro 2024. On May 31, an Afghan national motivated by Islamist ideology killed a police officer in Mannheim.<sup>11</sup> In early June, German authorities probed an application by a suspected ISK supporter to work as a security guard and steward for events outside the stadiums during Euro 2024.<sup>12</sup> The suspect was arrested at Cologne/Bonn Airport on June 8 for allegedly transferring almost 1,700 U.S. dollars to an Islamic State Khorasan account via a cryptocurrency exchange in September 2023.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the Taliban has had some success curtailing Islamic State Khorasan inside Afghanistan, the group seem to have switched to an external operations campaign, which is very alarming. And we've

b Editor's Note: Richard Walton provided additional details in a 2016 article in this publication. He wrote: "We were able to set up a state-of-the-art, integrated command-and-control system, which linked together multiple control rooms across London and the United Kingdom. Footage from our pre-existing extensive network of CCTV cameras as well as an array of cameras positioned at key sites gave us significant coverage, as did teams of overt and covert officers patrolling the Olympic sites and access points. There was a 'Gold' operational command-and-control center based in a warehouse in Lambeth and staffed by representatives from all police and security agencies. Additionally, a strategic control center was based at New Scotland Yard to manage the interface and coordination between all agencies. These control rooms were, in turn, linked to 'Bronze' control centers at each Olympic site. We also had Covert Control centers managing counterterrorism surveillance teams deployed against targets and a separate control room managing our reactive police resources that were on standby in case there was any incident: these included specialist teams of counterterrorism officers stationed in vehicles around London and ready to respond to any terrorist attack. Bomb disposal units were strategically positioned at key locations. The military and intelligence agencies also had their own control rooms linked to ours under a single command-and-control protocol. Securing the Games was the United Kingdom's largest-ever peacetime policing challenge. To coordinate all our efforts every morning during the Olympics, ministers chaired a daily security coordination meeting that was similar to the government's 'Cobra' meetings. Joining up all of these nodes required significant investment in high-end systems." Richard Walton, "Protecting Euro 2016 and the Rio Olympics: Lessons Learned from London 2012," *CTC Sentinel* 9:6 (2016).

c Editor's Note: "In the context of the fight against Islamist radicalization in France, prison intelligence rapidly developed from 2015 through the gradual creation of a dedicated service and a specific corps of professionals." David Henri Scheer and Gilles Chantraine, "Intelligence and radicalization in French prisons: Sociological analysis bottom-up," *Security Dialogue* 53:2 (2021).

d Editor's Note: France's national counterterrorism prosecution service—le parquet national antiterroriste (PNAT)—began work in July 2019. See Delphine Bauer, "Ouverture du parquet national antiterroriste: pour une force de frappe judiciaire renforcée," *Actu-Juridique.fr*, July 22, 2019.

e Editor's Note: "The Decree of 14 June 2017 establishing the CNRLT marked an important development in this cooperation. It entrusted two distinct missions to the CNRLT. Firstly, the coordination of the general activities of the intelligence services, and secondly, through the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (CNCT) created on this occasion, the steering of all the services contributing to the fight against terrorism." "National Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Coordination," *Élysée*, updated December 15, 2022.

f Editor's Note: "The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) is the UK's independent authority for all-source terrorism assessment. JTAC is based within MI5 and reports to the Director General, but their assessments are made independently." "Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre," MI5, n.d.

seen, in the past several years, connections with a threat to Europe specifically. For example, in 2020 there were some Tajik nationals arrested in Germany in contact with the group who were plotting to attack the U.S. military.<sup>14</sup>

In July 2023, the Germans arrested and subsequently charged seven individuals from Central Asia for allegedly plotting terrorist attacks on behalf of ISK in a plot connected to Holland.<sup>8</sup> In March 2024, the Germans arrested two Afghans plotting, in close consultation with ISK, to launch an attack in the area of the Swedish parliament.<sup>15</sup> In December last year, several Central Asians were arrested for a plot to attack Cologne cathedral on behalf of ISK.<sup>16</sup>

All this represents a serious concern and threat. We've seen this before with AQ, but ISIS in particular is demonstrating a clear intent to attack sporting events specifically. Threat is defined as capability and intent, and ISK have both. These plots, so far to date, have been disrupted, but the plots that were successful in Peshawar, Pakistan, in March 2022,<sup>17</sup> and in Kerman, Iran<sup>18</sup> and Moscow in March 2024<sup>19</sup> were highly complex attacks and delivered ruthlessly. This backdrop creates a very real concern ISK might have capability to carry out attacks in Europe against either the Euros or the Olympic Games. In my assessment, this is the biggest threat during this summer of sport, and it will be of great concern to the French and the Germans because of the effectiveness of Islamic State Khorasan's overseas attacks, and particularly their recent attacks in Moscow, Pakistan, and Iran. So, I think overwhelmingly that's the main concern, the main threat.

After the Moscow attack in March 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that ISK had attempted several attacks on French soil in recent months.<sup>20</sup> French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal also referred publicly to an ISK plot in Strasbourg in 2022 that had been thwarted.<sup>21</sup>

There was also a notable arrest in Coventry, U.K., in January 2023 of a PhD student who had built a drone for ISIS. He was convicted in September of that year.<sup>h</sup> It was a serious attempt to build a drone, and you wonder—if that had been successful—where that drone was destined for. Was it destined for Europe? Or was it destined to go back to ISIS? It is more likely that a drone built by an extremist in the U.K. was going to be used in an attack in the U.K. or Europe.

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**“I think 90 percent of the concern will be around Islamic State Khorasan and the challenges faced by authorities in disrupting what may be directed, enabled, or inspired attacks before, during, or after the Euros and the Olympic Games.”**

Khorasan and the challenges faced by authorities in disrupting what may be directed, enabled, or inspired attacks before, during, or after the Euros and the Olympic Games. France has a significant Jewish population. And both France and Germany have large Muslim populations with a proportion of violent extremists with strong links to Central Asia from where ISK is now operating. The group is using radicalized individuals from within the Central Asian diaspora in Europe to engage in plotting attacks. It's vital to have a good intelligence picture around radicalized individuals who might have connections with Central Asia and particularly Tajikistan given how many Tajiks have been implicated in Islamic State Khorasan-linked plots.

ISIS has a track record of attacking sport, including as part of the November 13, 2015, Paris attacks, an attempt to target the 80,000 football fans watching France against Germany at the Stade de France football stadium. It is also worth noting that ahead of the Rio Olympics in 2016, eight Islamist extremists were arrested and subsequently convicted for plotting to attack the Games with AK-47s. They were Brazilian extremists who had been radicalized by ISIS propaganda.<sup>22</sup> So that's an Olympic Games where most people thought there was no real threat at all, but even then, ISIS was engaged in inspiring others to carry out attacks.

**CTC: Fifty-two years ago in Munich, terrorists affiliated with the Palestinian group Black September murdered 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team after taking them hostage during the 1972 Olympics. With the Palestinian question currently at the forefront of global attention, what is your concern about the security implications for this year's summer of sport in Europe?**

**Walton:** The tragedy is that 52 years on, nothing really much has changed in terms of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But when we look at Hamas and Hezbollah—proxies of Iran that are basically aligned with certain Palestinian groups fighting Israel—these are terrorist organizations per se, but they haven't specifically to my knowledge advocated the targeting of any sporting events. They are not advocates of a global salafi-jihadi narrative. Their grievances and their war are focused on Israel. Whether we see that played out in terms of protest or violent terrorist acts is the question. My assessment is that we'll likely see it played out in serious protests in different guises, but not in terms of terrorism. There will be Palestinian sportsmen and women in the Olympics, as indeed there will be Lebanese and Iranian athletes in the Games. So I don't see Iran or any of its proxies conducting state-related terrorist activity against the Games. But there will be concerns, of course, and in the forefront of people's minds will be

g Editor's Note: According to German prosecutors, shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine in spring 2022, the suspects "travelled from there to Germany almost simultaneously. After entering the country, they joined forces with an accused who was being prosecuted separately in the Netherlands to form a terrorist organization with the aim of carrying out high-profile attacks in the spirit of IS in Germany or elsewhere in Western Europe. The group was in contact with members of the regional IS offshoot 'Islamic State Khorasan Province' (ISPK) who were abroad." "Charges Filed Against Seven Suspected Members of Islamist Terrorist Organization," Federal Prosecutor's Office of Germany, April 24, 2024; "Germany charges seven suspected ISIS-K members over attack plots," Reuters, April 24, 2024.

h Editor's Note: "The jury at Birmingham Crown Court heard how PhD student Mohamad Al-Bared, aged 26 of Kare Road in Coventry, made the drone specifically to transport an explosive or chemical weapon into enemy territory for ISIS. Component parts for the drone were made on his 3D printer found at his home address. He was arrested on 31 January [2023] in Coventry as his home address was raided by officers who seized the drone, 3D printer and several devices including phones and laptop." "Man found guilty of terror charge after building drone to give to ISIS," Counter Terrorism Policing, United Kingdom, September 28, 2023.

the 1972 Munich Games in which Black September, an offshoot of the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLO), carried out a terrible attack which resulted in all the hostages being killed alongside others.

**CTC: What is your view of the threat posed by the extreme-right to Euro 2024 and the Paris Olympics?**

**Walton:** There are always concerns around the far-right. I think this will be a particular concern for Germany for the Euros. We recently saw 27 individuals charged for a December 2022 attack plot against parliament to overthrow the government by Reichsbürger and QAnon adherents.<sup>23</sup> I think Germany does have some real threat issues around the far-right at the moment, but it's done a lot of disruption activity in respect of that, so the hope is they have done enough to suppress the threat. However, with the far-right, you can never be too sure, because you always have the lone-actor threat. The Anders Breivik attack in Norway in 2011, a year before the London Olympics, for instance, was very much in the forefront of our minds in terms of the right-wing threat: somebody self-inspired, not aligned to any particular organization except his own. There's not a lot you can do except have very comprehensive intelligence to disrupt that. So, you're never complacent about the far-right.

**CTC: How do you view the cyber threat picture during this summer of sport in Germany and France?**

**Walton:** We were concerned about cyber-attacks during the London Games. And when you talk about cyber threats, you're normally talking about state cyber-related threats—Russia, China, and Iran being the three that you would normally worry about. In terms of this Olympic Games, I think we're talking about Russian state cyber threats and Russian-aligned hacktivists who will probably be trying to disrupt the Games in different ways or disrupt particular nation-states' sporting activities. So, that will feature, and obviously there's usually an element of organized criminality around some of that, too, which is difficult to counter.

Just going back to the intelligence picture with the French, I know that they have now quite comprehensive monitoring of social media, but we had to set that up from scratch in 2012 because it was in its infancy.<sup>i</sup> It is very important to do, and I think it's already borne some fruit because in April they made an arrest of a teenager who posted something on social media saying he planned to create an explosive belt and wanted to die a martyr at the Olympics.<sup>24</sup> When you pick it up in the context of the Games, you have to act on it very fast. I think the threat matrix is quite different to the one we faced. France has already got their posture up to 'Attack Emergency,'

i In a 2016 article in this publication, Richard Walton wrote, "Ahead of the [London] Olympics we developed a tailored, social media monitoring capability, which allowed us to observe extremists' use of social media platforms to promulgate their views. Sophisticated software gave us 'sentiment analysis' across communities and enabled us to respond to and prevent planned public disorder by radical and extremist groups. This proved to be of immense value in the run up to and for the duration of the Olympics, particularly during the two months that the Olympic torch made its way through the United Kingdom. This capability was developed in just four months at a cost of GBP2 million but continues to be, in the years since, highly valuable to counterterrorism efforts in the United Kingdom. It is an example of how the Olympic Games can provide a security as well as a sporting legacy for a country." Walton.

**“The biggest concern with the Paris Olympics is going to be the opening ceremony. Opening ceremonies are particularly vulnerable anyway because you have the vast majority of the world watching them. So if you can attack anywhere during the opening ceremony, but particularly in and around the venue, then as far as terrorists are concerned, that would be a major success.”**

the highest posture in terms of direct threat level, which doesn't give them much room to maneuver.<sup>25</sup> And if you go back to 2015, post the Paris attacks, they invoked something called Opération Sentinelle, which was putting a huge number, up to 10,000, armed officers and military on the streets. Their own parliamentary commission in 2016 said that this tactic was highly ineffective and achieved almost nothing.<sup>26</sup> They do have a temptation sometimes to flood the streets with police and soldiers, and that really would be a mistake. We had almost no armed police officers on the streets in 2012 for the London Games; we were wholly reliant on active intelligence and actually creating an environment on the streets, which was relaxed and informal. We're not convinced that putting armed officers or soldiers on the streets deters anything or even reassures the public. It's an easy thing to do but very costly, and it's also quite difficult to reverse. France extended the state of emergency many times at huge cost. And the parliamentary commission review basically concluded that it was ineffective as a tactic. But the French, post the recent Moscow ISK attack, reviewed their security posture and put it straight up to the highest level. And I can't see it coming down between now and the start of the Games because the threat picture is basically going to stay the same if not get worse, especially with regards to ISK.

**CTC: One of the things that that you've stressed before is that while the venues and athletes themselves will be well protected, there's a concern that the terrorists could strike elsewhere during major sporting events,<sup>j</sup> which makes it very, very difficult for authorities. Because you could put a lot of resources into protecting an Olympic Village and stadiums, and so forth, but bad actors can get a lot of press by launching attacks anywhere in the country during the sporting contest. How did you think through that challenge in London in 2012, and what are the lessons learned from that?**

j In a June 2016 *CTC Sentinel* article, Richard Walton noted that "the vulnerable underbelly of these events is outside of the host cities in venues and stadiums, transport hubs, and other crowded places where police are not familiar with high levels of security." Walton.

**Walton:** You have to have some protective security coverage elsewhere outside of the capital city. You cannot just bring all the resources and all the intelligence gathering straight into the capital and expect that this will work because there will potentially be problems elsewhere. So you've got to have a basic level of intelligence gathering and operations outside of where the actual sporting main event is.

The biggest concern with the Paris Olympics is going to be the opening ceremony. Opening ceremonies are particularly vulnerable anyway because you have the vast majority of the world watching them. So if you can attack anywhere during the opening ceremony, but particularly in and around the venue, then as far as terrorists are concerned, that would be a major success. So, you're always very, very nervous about the threat during the opening ceremony, but with France, they've got an opening ceremony that's taking place across the city and on water, which presents a huge challenge for them because it's very dispersed and it's quite a long route. You rely normally, with opening ceremonies, on a sterile secure stadium that has been searched, with fingertip searching, two weeks before and then locked down with search arches (airport-style security including metal detectors) in place to make sure you know exactly what has and hasn't gone into that stadium after you fingertip-searched it. You can't do that effectively in a large area across a national capital city. You can't do that as effectively—particularly on water, for instance—as effectively as you can in a stadium. So I know there are concerns about this, and I know that Macron's even considered, as I think he put it, plan Bs and plan Cs, which is changing the opening ceremony and possibly reverting it back to a stadium.<sup>27</sup> I think they've cut the spectator numbers down from 600,000 to 300,000 for the route of the opening ceremony, but that's still a major challenge to protect. It's a bit like when we run royal events in London such as the coronation and you have the procession going through several areas—like with the coronation through Windsor into London and then elsewhere. It's a major policing challenge, and it's a major security challenge. And in the context of an ISIS Khorasan threat, then that is a concern. And of course, you don't tend to have, in the stadium, masses of police because you've used security to lock down the stadium, whereas in a ceremony that's going across the national city, you're going to have to use a lot of police, both uniformed and undercover, to try and keep that whole route safe. They will be very concerned about it.

**CTC:** And you speak from experience because back in 2012 you helped oversee security for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

**Walton:** Yes, and also Margaret Thatcher's funeral in 2013 and other major ceremonial events where you had activity that's moving across the city. It is much more dynamic than what I would call a sterile stadium where you've got everything going on in the middle of it. When you've essentially got moving targets and moving crowds, it's very difficult to make that 100 percent safe. I'm sure they'll try and do it with a huge number of police, the military, uniformed and covert, but it's still a big challenge. And, of course, it's a big challenge also in terms of aerial threats, maritime threats etc. It's very difficult to disable a moving boat, for instance. The mitigation for that in London was to have an aircraft carrier on the Thames with Marines in helicopters that could shoot engine blocks out. It might sound like a simple thing to stop a boat, but it's actually not that easy if you've got a threat moving in a boat.

**“The major concern with sporting events is always marauding firearms attacks, which obviously Paris experienced with devastating effects in 2015. Marauding knife attacks as well, which is very, very easy to do with devastating effects.”**

**CTC:** And obviously with the Olympic Games, there are so many different venues across the city with so many spectators and participants, and you're always going to have crowds gathering to get into venues. And so, as you've outlined, it's a very complex challenge. As new technologies come on stream, it offers terrorists new ways to launch attacks. Broadly speaking, what attack vectors do authorities need to be vigilant about during this sporting summer in Europe?

**Walton:** Mostly, it's the same as we've seen in the various theaters around the world, particularly in ISIS' methodologies of fighting in Syria and Iraq. The major concern with sporting events is always marauding firearms attacks, which obviously Paris experienced with devastating effects in 2015. Marauding knife attacks as well, which is very, very easy to do with devastating effects.<sup>k</sup>

In terms of technology, no terrorist organization has yet successfully attacked a European event with a drone technology, but there's a lot of concern because of the use of drones by terrorist organizations around the world, whether it's Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS, AQ in various places and indeed even the Houthis as well—the Iranian proxy—in Yemen. Drones are being widely used in these theaters, and I fear it will only be a matter of time before they're used to deadly effect in Europe or in the West.

And I mentioned the arrest last year in Coventry of the PhD student who had made a drone. And of course, drones, as I said before, are very, very hard to mitigate against. There's also concern about swarms of drones. I think that's probably beyond the capabilities of even Islamic State Khorasan. But even a single drone coming in with either explosives or chemicals could cause a lot of problems. We've yet to be tested in real time on this in terms of the countermeasures that have been in place for several years now at major sporting events. So, we'll have to hope that there is capability that can take out a drone attack, if it is attempted.

**CTC:** And then on the firearm side of the equation, you've got 3D printing and being able to make firearms out of non-metallic components when it comes to the deployment of metal detectors and that sort of protection. Technology marches forward, and obviously authorities have to respond to that and

<sup>k</sup> Editor's Note: "Marauding terrorist attacks (MTA) are fast-moving, violent incidents where assailants move through a location aiming to find and kill or injure as many people as possible. Most deaths occur within the first few minutes of the attack, before police are able to respond." "What is a Marauding Terrorist Attack?" U.K. National Protective Security Authority, May 31, 2022.

find ways to mitigate threats that stem from that. If something does get through in Germany or France, what precepts need to guide the day after to reassure the public and not let the terrorists ruin everything? I know for the London in 2012 you had the maxim “the Games must go on.”

**Walton:** Well, the individual that was arrested in Coventry in possession of a handmade drone also had a 3D printer and had been making parts for the drone with the 3D printer.<sup>28</sup> So I think your point about 3D printers is well-made. If you go back to ‘72 in Munich, the Games actually went on there after a 34-hour suspension despite that tragedy and the number of deaths. A nation-state never wants to allow a terrorist organization to be able to disrupt life for very long. I think back to 2005, after the 7/7 attack, we tried to get the city back up and running as soon as possible—in hours, not days and weeks—to return to normality as soon as possible. In terms of the Games, yes, the Games must go on, and you want the world to be able to carry on and enjoy the Games and not be disrupted by a single-issue terrorist organization intent on committing violence and murder. But you also have in mind not to overreact. Some of this is about media management as well. It’s very easy for an individual to get global media attention by doing something crazy, which may not even be violent. Back in 2012, we were concerned about protest groups: Protest groups come up with very innovative ways of creating an incident which becomes a story, which is then broadcast around the world in seconds. Even if a terrorist attack is successful, you want to move on because by moving on, you’re showing they can’t succeed in their activities and in disrupting the Games. You have to win that ideological battle. If you close everything down, the terrorists win and you lose and that’s not good. So that was very much in the forefront of our minds and the forefront of the ministers’ minds. And from our experience of terrorist attacks in the U.K., the faster you can get the situation back to normality, the better.

**CTC: On the need to share intelligence within different agencies both at a national level and an international level—when you’re thinking about major sporting contests with a whole bunch of different countries involved and spectators from around the planet—talk about the lessons learned from London in 2012 and what you got right about the intelligence sharing. How did you make sure everyone was on the same page so that there were that as few silos as possible when it came to working together across agencies and across different countries?**

**Walton:** Internationally, relationships are built in the months and the years before the Games start, and it’s really too late to start making them in the weeks beforehand. So they’re either there or they’re not. Again, going back to the French commission in 2016 on the Paris attacks, they were highly critical on the relationship between French and Belgian intelligence agencies,<sup>1</sup> where there was

**“Some countries seem to put aside their differences when the Olympic Games come around and are happy to share intelligence information they wouldn’t ordinarily share. It’s very good to capitalize on that and to encourage that as much as possible. Putting aside these differences, your normal differences, and actually encouraging a sharing relationship because it could be the Games are next held at their country, when they’ll expect and hope that you will share intelligence with them.”**

no sharing for different reasons. Actually, the Belgians didn’t share for constitutional reasons because they weren’t allowed to. It’s part of their constitution. So there were subsequent changes made in Belgium around that and also the French - Belgian counterterrorism relationship that was greatly improved subsequently. But you have to invest in those relationships heavily before these events occur, and that also includes with nation-states that you wouldn’t necessarily always be routinely sharing intelligence with.

Some countries seem to put aside their differences when the Olympic Games come around and are happy to share intelligence information they wouldn’t ordinarily share. It’s very good to capitalize on that and to encourage that as much as possible. Putting aside these differences, your normal differences, and actually encouraging a sharing relationship because it could be the Games are next held at their country, when they’ll expect and hope that you will share intelligence with them. It’s vitally important, the intelligence-sharing networks—for instance, Five Eyes and the multinational fora like Europol and Interpol, are all really important of course—and they are important for day-to-day stuff anyway. So, they’re already happening. So, there shouldn’t really be anything that’s exceptional. But you’ve got every country pretty much represented at the Games, and they also want the protection for their athletes. So, there’s a vested interest in sharing anything that they’re concerned about or any intelligence that they pick up about the Games; it’s in their interest to share it and we were very keen to make that point: ‘It’s in your interest as well as our interest that you share anything with us that’s Games-related where you pick up intelligence.’ In Pakistan, for instance, you pick up intelligence that might be talking about the Olympic Games, you share it with us and let’s all analyze it together. I think that spirit of cooperation tends to happen at the Olympic Games. It was certainly my experience going back to European Olympic Games anyway, during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games it certainly happened, and it certainly happened in London. I’m sure it will happen in France.

Despite the threat—and the threat is high—I have confidence that both the Euros in Germany and the Games in France will be

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s Note: The parliamentary report stated that a key part of its mission was to “shed light on the dysfunction in Franco-Belgian intelligence efforts and to put forward recommendations so that in the future there is total joined-up surveillance by our respective intelligence services.” “Rapport fait au Nom De La Commission D’enquête relative aux moyens mis en oeuvre par l’État pour lutter contre le terrorisme depuis le 7 janvier 2015,” Assemblée Nationale, July 5, 2016, p. 17.

mostly successful in terms of security and countering terrorism threats. I think there will be security incidents, some possibly significant, but my judgment is that these will be a microcosm of what's going on in the world. So, some incidents relating to Russia, Ukraine; some incidents related to Gaza; Afghanistan. I have confidence that the French and the Germans can hold back and disrupt the terrorist plots that may be planned or may be inspired by the likes of Islamic State Khorasan. But the Games are a big challenge. Even with all the planning we did, the security challenge in the London 2012 Olympics was far bigger than I had envisaged and far more complex than we had planned for. And of course, you've also got the Paralympic Games. So, security is not done until the last day of the Paralympic Games.

Both Germany and France have a lot of experience dealing with terrorism and have been increasingly successful disrupting terrorist plots in the last seven, eight, nine years. France learned

the same lessons in 2015-2016 as we learned in 2005 and which the Americans learned post-9/11. If you look at the 9/11 Commission Report and compare that to the report we did on 7/7 and the report the French government did into the Paris 2015 attacks, the learning is pretty much all the same. It's about those core themes of the need for integrated, fused intelligence; about brilliant C3 command and control; and about having contingency for every eventuality; and then about working together to achieve a secure Games.

You don't want the Games or Euros defined by security; you want them defined by sport. So the security should not be the preeminent theme, which is why again, I'd like to see the French pulling back the soldiers and police off the streets. It's not the way really to achieve security. They should rely on their new infrastructures, their new integrated intelligence systems, their new command and control systems, which I'm confident will see them through successfully.

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