

**BEIJING OLYMPICS -
A SECURITY PERSPECTIVE**

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David Rubens Associates is a specialist corporate security consultancy offering strategic security services to individuals and organisations across the world.

DRA has worked with government agencies, NGO's, international conglomerates and major global events, and brings a mixture of strategic vision, operational experience and academic research to all of its projects, however large or small.

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Beijing Olympics – A Security Perspective

As I am writing this the Olympics are entering into their second week, and apart from a couple of low-level banner-waving protests there have so far been no major security incidents. Outside of Beijing there has been increased anti-government activity in outlying Chinese regions such as Xinjiang, where Islamic separatists have both attacked local government installations as well as threatened to attack Chinese Olympic facilities, but so far this has not had a significant impact on the Olympics itself.

However, what we have been given is an insight into how Chinese authorities have run the security aspect of the Olympics, and as such it is also an opportunity to look at how they have managed their operation and to compare that with other similar global-scale international events such as G8 summits.

The growing trend in G8 and other major events is to choose the location specifically for its ability to offer tight security management. Whether it is the annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, or the most recent G8 meetings in Gleneagles, Scotland and Hokkaido, Japan, the venues for the forums have been in isolated, defensible places where it has been almost impossible to gain access unless through officially authorized means. For all intents and purposes those areas are no longer public property, open to all free citizens, but have become the equivalent of military or nuclear bases where the government has the power to bar freedom of access to anyone who is 'not on the list'.

By its nature the Olympics is obviously not open to that level of control, but it is also true that it is probably the single most high-profile event on the global calendar that also offers comparably easy open access to anyone with a ticket. The 'force multiplier' effect of the Olympics on any political protest can be seen by the still iconic images of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their black-gloved fists at the 1968 Olympics, or the attack on Israeli athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympics. There was also the bomb attack during the Los Angeles Olympics that killed one person and injured 111 others.

The Beijing security programme has, as far as I can tell, been run on the 'Disneyland' model of security management. By this I mean that although visitors to Disneyland seem to have a freedom to enjoy themselves in whatever way they wish, they are in fact operating in a

tightly controlled environment where any behaviour even slightly outside the accepted 'norm' is immediately monitored, responded to and controlled. One authority tells of how he was warned that he would be ejected from Disneyland when his five-year old daughter wanted to walk around with her shoes off. In much the same way, the activities in and around the Olympic centers (and actually, throughout Beijing, including the officially-designated 'Protest Areas'), are tightly monitored, and it is almost impossible for anyone, and certainly for groups, to do anything other than the most basic of 'tourist' activities.

The second factor that has led to a trouble-free Olympics is that the authorities had a clearly-developed plan for dealing with both local and Western protesters. Local protesters, even those simply applying to the local police station to receive official permission to use the protest areas to highlight their problems, were immediately 'disappeared', and there are many authenticated cases of people in the last few weeks being arrested and imprisoned for making such applications. As far as Western protesters are concerned, they are immediately arrested, taken to the local police station and then served with a deportation order. This allows the authorities to get rid of the problem in the smoothest possible way, without offering the possibility of the protesters becoming 'martyrs', or using court cases in order to gain further publicity.

Whilst there have been some protests from western organizations and news agencies, the Chinese authorities have obviously factored this in and decided that they can live with that level of disgruntlement.

And the final factor which allows the Chinese authorities to act in this way? It is the fact that there had clearly been an agreement made with the International Olympic Committee under which the Chinese government has agreed to keep everything low-key and the IOC has agreed not to make a fuss, and to conveniently forget that individual freedoms such as the right to information and the right to protest were two of the criteria under which Beijing was given the right to host games.

All in all, in this area as in all others in the Olympics, China has shown that an attention to detail combined with official backing from the highest level has given them the ability to create a self-contained artificial environment over which they have absolute control, and under which any behaviour that they deem 'inappropriate' can immediately be stamped out. As far as the Chinese authorities are concerned, from this perspective at least the Games so far have been a complete success.



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