

Testing Time in Torino

by Matt Baglio
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Authorities from Europe and the United States, as well as Italy, are facing an Olympic-sized challenge as the Winter Games get under way. From the site of the competition, our correspondent reports on the planning, technology and measures taken to ensure a safe and secure event.

On the very day that the Olympic Torch arrived on Italian soil, Italian authorities got a wake-up call as security forces battled rioters in and around the host city of Torino. The melee was touched off after a hundred police in riot gear were sent in to break up a protest over the building of a new, high-speed train in the Val di Susa, one of the main arteries connecting Torino to outlying Olympic venues in the surrounding mountains. A thousand protestors and anarchist-insurrectionists marched on the office of the prefect in Torino, seat of the region's provincial authority, shut down Torino's central train station for one hour and vandalized an Olympic hospitality tent. It's the kind of unique security challenge that confronts Italian officials as they secure the 2006 Winter Games and face a mix of activists and an organized populace that often takes to the streets. In addition, Italy faces the real risk of an external, as well as an internal, threat from Islamist terrorists. The country has been on heightened alert since the London bombings in July 2005. Like the United Kingdom, Italy has been one of the United States' staunchest allies in the war on terror, especially in Iraq, where Italy has over 3,000 soldiers. Recent intelligence reports have cited radical Muslims living in and around Torino as a threat to western interests, and recent Internet threats indicate that Italy may be at the top of Al Qaeda's hit list. At a December 2, 2005, session of Parliament, Giuseppe Pisanu, Italy's interior minister, warned that "the worldwide resonance of the [Olympics] and the fact that it coincides with the election campaign could prove of great interest to terror organizations." Despite the fact that no specific threat has been launched against the Olympics, Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi said that his government was taking every threat seriously. The challenge The Winter Olympics — despite being one-third the size of the Summer Olympics — presents its own unique set of security challenges. For one thing, the venues can be more spread out, and harsh winter conditions stress security forces to the limit. In the case of the Torino Games, there will be one Olympic Village located in the city and two more in mountain towns 60 miles away. Additionally, security personnel on the ground face a stiff challenge, as spectators entering venues wear bulky winter clothing. Narrow mountain roads can quickly get clogged with traffic, further complicating things. "The Games in Piedmont present some peculiarities compared to others," Francesco Tagliente, the head of the Interior Ministry's Public Security Office, told HSToday . "Mobility and communications in such conditions will require particular care." In order to face the challenge of the massive event, it was vital that authorities come up with a comprehensive plan and the forces required to carry it out. In order to do this, the Torino Organizing Committee of the XX Olympic Winter Games (TOROC) enlisted the help of the Ministry of the Interior, which took the lead on all security measures. "We are taking every measure necessary to ensure the safety of the Games," said Tagliente. "We will utilize a large force of 9,000 agents, which we can augment if the need arises." The force will consist of roughly 4,000 police, 3,500 Carabinieri (state and military police), 1,000 Guardia di Finanza (revenue police), as well as 200 forestry guards, augmented by alpine soldiers and infantry and Airborne Warning and Command Systems. The amount of money being spent on this endeavor is not being disclosed, though in December 2005 the government did add an additional e10 million (\$12 million) to the budget. In order to organize this massive endeavor, Italian officials first met with American representatives from Salt Lake City, Utah, who hosted the last Winter Olympics in 2002. In addition to attending those games themselves, TOROC hosted four days of seminars, 25 meetings and 70 hours of presentations, which included 255 participants during the spring and summer of 2003. Among the issues discussed were planning and the need for an accurate and well-organized security team that could not only communicate but analyze and respond to potential threats. "The most important thing we learned was that we needed to have a strong chain of command," said Tagliente. In addition to officials from Salt Lake City, Italian authorities also worked closely with organizers for the European Championships in Portugal in 2004, the 2004 Summer Games in Athens and, more recently, the funeral of Pope John Paul II in Rome last April, attended by over 2 million people and a hundred world leaders. For that event, a heavy security net was placed on the Italian capital, including no-fly zones, warships patrolling off the coast and snipers on rooftops. Reiterating lessons learned, Tagliente noted, "The international cooperation of the police is very important during these kinds of events." Unprecedented organization On the basis of the experience gained from monitoring and taking part in events similar in size and scope to the Olympics, the Ministry of the Interior established the National Information Center on the Torino Winter Olympics (CNIO) in order to intensify intelligence gathering and increase the international cooperation of police forces, as well as to link the disparate security services into one body. CNIO, which had several tasks to perform, comprised representatives of the various branches of police, border guards and fire corps, representatives of TOROC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Direzione Centrale della Polizia di Prevenzione (the counterterrorism branch of the Italian Police force) and "point men" from the embassies of the 80 participating countries. Prior to the start of the games, it was CNIO's job to synthesize all information, regardless of its source, and establish a working international approach to information sharing through existing channels, such as Interpol, Europol and the Police Working Group on Terrorism, as well as through the designated "point men" of the participating countries. During the games, CNIO will utilize these existing channels of cooperation to analyze and act on intelligence it receives from the field. But it won't be the first filter. That job will fall to the Strategic Counterterrorism Analysis Committee (CASA), which is composed of representatives of the police forces and intelligence services SISMI and SISDe. It will be CASA's job to analyze all the raw intelligence that it receives from

the intelligence services and to then pass it along to CNIO. In order to achieve this level of "synergy," officials will use a central command center linked to 21 separate control rooms located at Olympic sites. These control rooms will be staffed by the local police forces and will be in constant contact with the central command center. "In this way, we will have channels that are both vertical and horizontal," said Tagliente. After the Games are finished, CNIO will write an after-action report and analysis. Close ties with the US Italy will have a close working relationship with US law-enforcement and security personnel for game security. With the largest contingent of athletes and journalists present at the Games, the US has a particular interest in ensuring the safety of its citizens. For this reason, the Italian government worked closely with the US Embassy in Rome, conducting more than 25 meetings, workshops and technical summits between Italian police officers and US officials from the embassy, Milan consulate and various US law enforcement and intelligence agencies, including the CIA, FBI and the Diplomatic Security Services. Because the nearest consulate is more than 90 miles from Torino, US officials established temporary offices in Torino to house the Olympic Security Coordinator, Olympic Logistics Coordinator and the FBI liaison. During the games, the FBI will provide technical support in tricky operational areas, such as hazardous materials response and criminal behavioral science as it relates to international terrorism. Special training On October 27, 2005, officials in Torino conducted a realistic anti-terrorism drill in which the city suffered a triple attack. Over 700 security and rescue personnel took part in the exercise, as counterterrorist teams armed with submachine guns, as well as HAZMAT crews, responded to a series of "explosions" that occurred simultaneously inside and outside the Porta Nuova train station, disrupting train service and snarling traffic with clouds of smoke that filled the city streets. A few minutes later, forces were then called in to deal with an abandoned backpack that posed a potential bomb threat. The drills followed on the heels of similar exercises in Rome, Naples and Milan, all intended to analyze the efficiency and readiness of security and emergency personnel. Interior Minister Pisanu hailed the drills as a success, and said that "the tests were needed to verify the validity of anti-terrorism plans." The plan The games will take place under a strict no-fly zone, and video surveillance will cover all key sites, including those outside the Olympic Village. Various roadblocks will be set up to control traffic on the narrow mountain roads, and driving cars to the venues will be prohibited. Instead, visitors will be encouraged to either take public transportation or park their cars in designated parking lots and then take a shuttle bus. "We have a transportation plan put in place just for the Olympics," said Torino's mayor, Sergio Chiamparino. "Unlike Salt Lake City, where the highway got directly to the competition sites, our valleys are smaller. Some sites will be accessible only by public transportation." In addition, Italy has contemplated a controversial move to suspend the European Union rule allowing citizens from the 15 member nations to cross borders without showing identification (known as the "Schlengen rules") during the Games. "We do not exclude a suspension of Schlengen," Tagliente said at a November 2005 press conference. As with the Athens Games, private security guards will be barred from carrying weapons at Olympic sites. In almost all areas, including information technology, organizers chose to go with solid, tested products, rather than flashy technological alternatives. The company Atos Origin, with its worldwide headquarters in Paris, will be in charge of the Games' accreditation (ACR) system. According to Enrico Frascari, Technology general manager for TOROC, the Atos Origin ACR package, combining a physical identification badge and scanning system with back-office database applications linked to the Games'IT network, "brings clarity" to the complex function of registering and documenting the over 90,000 accreditations that will be needed. As for communications, like Greece, Italy will use the Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) system. When asked if he was worried about TETRA performing up to specs, Tagliente responded confidently, saying, "A careful planning of an event has a solution to everything. There are always principal services and alternative systems in order to safeguard our capabilities." In many instances, organizers chose to go with experienced companies that had a proven Olympic track record so that the transition would be as seamless as possible. Garrett Metal Detectors, based in Garland, Texas, was present in Salt Lake City, and TNT Global Express, a division of TNT NV based in Holland, is the "official supplier" for logistics and express transport services for the Games. It was chosen because of its proven commitment to security — guaranteed by a system called "Sky Guard," an electric eye, which, through the global positioning system satellite network, can monitor in real time, 24 hours a day, all TNT vehicles in circulation. Analysis As the Olympic Torch wound its way toward Torino and the opening ceremonies on February 10, Italy's security preparations still had a long way to go in order to run smoothly. Italy's police forces have often been criticized in the past for taking a heavy hand when it comes to crowd control. Riots erupted at the 2001 G8 summit, during which a protestor was shot by police and — as witnessed by the Torino protests over the high-speed train — there is a natural distrust of authority. Anarchist elements seem ready to pounce at any moment, and, in this modern world of cell phones and instant messaging, it doesn't take long for a small demonstration to escalate into a full-scale riot. In his December 2005 speech before Parliament, Pisanu expressed concern that anarchist-insurrectionists might try to sabotage the Olympics in some way. A few months before, security forces had recovered a document titled "Action Map," in which anarchist-insurrectionists had listed various Olympic sites as targets. Italian officials, however, are optimistic that, despite the threat of continued protests, things will work out in the end. "Even if there are some protestors and they are a little extreme, they are very limited and so they are easy to control. The threat is real, but I'm not talking about acts of terrorism, just blocking a road or demonstrating," said Chiamparino. A campaign was recently launched calling for a United Nations-sponsored truce to be in effect during the Games, but it may not be enough. Authorities will have to walk a fine line if they are to avoid repeat incidents like the one in Val di Susa. "We have to make sure that things don't get out of hand," said Luca Andrea Mantovani, the official spokesperson for the Minister of the Interior, when asked to comment on the threat posed by anarchists. "But we are optimists that everything will turn out fine." One thing is clear, optimistic or not: When it comes to securing the Olympic Games, Italian authorities are leaving nothing to chance. Matt Baglio is a freelance writer based in Rome. He has worked as a screenwriter in Los Angeles, for the Associated Press in Rome, and as an editor and contributor for various magazines in Italy and the United States.