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Canadian Air Force Capt. Sarah Wuntke hands the Olympic Torch off to Warrant Officer Patrick Young on the fourth day of the Canadian torch relay.

Preparing for Vancouver

PROTECTING THE XXIst WINTER GAMES
WILL CONSTITUTE THE LARGEST SECURITY
OPERATION IN CANADIAN HISTORY.

By **JOE WIEBE**

When the camouflage-colored Canadian Forces chopper finally appears, it is more than half an hour late. It circles the designated landing area, a messy dirt-and-gravel square next to the Athletes Village—the \$1 billion construction project on prime waterfront land in the heart of Vancouver that is still under construction—with the Games less than four months away. The Griffin helicopter circles again ... and again. For 15 minutes the helicopter goes round and round in the sky above the small crowd of reporters gathered below.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Canadian Forces officials stationed with the media keep straight faces, betraying nothing, but after a while the journalists begin to grow restless; some take up cell phones to check messages or even make calls; others complain about how cold they are and what they could be doing instead of this.

Finally, the big chopper begins its descent. Television camera operators jump to action, and photographers begin snapping pictures in earnest. The helicopter slowly lowers itself toward the ground, sending dust and bits of paper and garbage swirling in the air around the construction site. Then, just as it is about to land, the engine whines with power and the chopper ascends quickly, only to resume circling the area once again.

Soon, the RCMP liaison, Staff Sergeant Mike Côté, gathers reporters and cameras for an impromptu press conference. He tells them this morning's event, the first public security test as part of a week-long series of exercises, has been aborted by the pilot, who felt the landing zone was not safe enough. It seems someone on the construction crew had left an excavator in the area, and the result is ...

But even as Côté speaks, directly behind him the helicopter can be seen descending toward the construction site once more. Finally, as his voice is literally drowned out by the noise of the spinning rotors and the cameras shift focus from his face to instead film what is happening behind him, he gives up and turns to see for himself.

The chopper lands about 50 meters north of the designated spot, on a paved square right next to the water of False Creek. The Emergency Response Team, four men clad in black from head to toe and carrying large weapons pointed at the ground, climb out of the helicopter and begin walking—strolling might be a better description—toward the Athletes Village. The helicopter rises into the air behind them, and eventually the team disappears from sight behind one of the large new buildings.

Talk about anticlimactic.

This nearly botched simulation, held on Oct. 20, 2009, opened Pegasus Guardian 3/Spartan Rings, the largest security exercise in advance of the XXI Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in Vancouver and Whistler, British Columbia, Canada, from Feb. 12 to 28, 2010. The training exercise was meant to test the preparedness of what is likely the most expensive security setup in the history of the Winter Olympics. Heavily criticized by local and national media outlets, the bungled beginning to this exercise left many critics questioning openly if it was a preview of more serious problems to come. Given the lack of urgency on display during the simulation, one had to wonder if the security officials responsible for guaranteeing the safety of athletes, visitors and residents during the Games were up to the challenge.

Most expensive Winter Games security setup ever

When the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) won the right to host the XXI Winter Olympics, its projected security budget was \$175 million Canadian (\$164 million US), all of which would be funded jointly by the Canadian government and the province of British Columbia (BC).

To handle Games security, the Vancouver 2010 Integrated Security Unit (ISU) was formed under the leadership of the RCMP/Canada's federal police force. The ISU also includes representatives of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), the Canadian Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and several other security-related organizations.

In February 2009, one year before the start of the Games, Public Safety Canada, the Canadian counterpart to the US Department of Homeland Security, announced that the finalized

Security budget

(all figures in millions in Canadian funds)

\$491.9	RCMP - Integrated Security Unit
\$212	Department of National Defence
\$25	Transport Canada (NAV Canada) - enhanced air navigation
\$11	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
\$9.8	Industry Canada - communication networks and wireless devices for security agencies
\$8.8	Transport Canada - inspection/enforcement activities
\$1.2	Citizenship and Immigration Canada for security screening
\$1.2	Public Safety Canada
\$0.9	Public Health Agency of Canada
\$1.4	Federal Employee Benefit Plan - RCMP overtime costs
\$137	Contingency Reserve
\$900.2	Total Budget

security budget for the 2010 Winter Olympics had risen to a jaw-dropping \$900 million (about \$844 million US—although as late as July 2008, officials were still claiming the total budget would be \$175 million Canadian). The ISU's portion of that is only \$492 million (\$461 million US), with the lion's share of the remainder going to the Department of National Defence (\$212 million or \$198 million US) and a contingency reserve of \$137 million, which is nearly as large as the entire original budget. The remaining \$59 million (\$55 million US) is split between several governmental arms, ranging from CSIS to Transport Canada.

Simply put, according to Staff Sergeant Côté, "It's the largest security operation, ever, in Canadian history."



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The \$900 million bill will be shared between the province of BC, which will spend \$252.2 million, and the Canadian government, which is responsible for the remaining \$647.5 million, as well as any unforeseen costs.

Given that every Olympiad is unique, with different factors affecting each, it is difficult to effectively compare security budgets between them. But still, it is interesting to note that only \$310 million US dollars were spent on security at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, even though those Winter Olympics came right on the heels of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The Italian authorities responsible for the 2006 Games in Torino never revealed a security budget, but estimates peg it at \$140 million US dollars.

The use of the military in security for Olympics also muddies the numbers because, in previous Games, the authorities may not have broken out those costs in their budget disclosures. The Vancouver budget does include the cost of military personnel, however, which might help explain why it is perilously close to cracking the \$1 billion mark, a number that might be expected in a Summer Games budget.

Two games?

According to RCMP Constable Mandy Edwards, an ISU spokesperson, the biggest security challenge is the geographic separation between Vancouver and Whistler, a small alpine village 125 km (78 miles) north of the city.

"It's almost as if we have two games going on because of the diversity in the locations," she explained to *Homeland Security Today*.

Security responsibilities within the city of Vancouver include four Olympic venues used for hockey, curling, short-track speed skating and figure skating; the Athletes Village and Main Media Centre; BC Place Stadium, which will host the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as nightly medal presentations; and hotels where media, visiting dignitaries and International Olympic Committee members will be staying.

Also within the Greater Vancouver area is the suburban city of Richmond just to the south below the north arm of the Fraser River. Security concerns there are the Richmond Olympic Oval (speed skating) and the Vancouver International Airport.

Cypress Mountain to the north of Vancouver (in the municipality of West Vancouver) needs to be secured, as well, since the venues for Freestyle Skiing and Snowboard competitions are located there.

Whistler, meanwhile, is connected to Vancouver by only one road, the Sea-to-Sky Highway, which underwent an enormous, \$600 million upgrade in advance of the Olympics. Security needs there include the Whistler Creekside venue, where all of the alpine skiing events will be held, and Whistler Olympic Park, where ski jumping, cross-country skiing and biathlon events will be staged. Sliding events such as bobsleigh, luge and skeleton will be held at the Whistler Sliding Centre. Other security concerns include the Whistler Media Centre, Whistler Olympic Village and a Medals Plaza that will be set up in the town square each night.

Security personnel

In general terms, the responsibility for securing the games falls

to two primary groups: the ISU, led by the RCMP, but including various police forces; and the Canadian Forces, which includes Army, Navy and Air Force personnel.

Edwards said that the ISU contingent will consist of “approximately 6,000 law enforcement personnel. That includes 1,800 from our policing partners and then 4,200 from the RCMP.” These forces will be drawn from across Canada, which means, “you could walk up and see a Newfoundland Constabulary officer standing next to a Brandon City Police officer, and each officer will be in their own respective uniform.”

Specialist police units such as emergency response teams, which are comparable to US-style special weapons and tactics teams, police dog units and tactical troops will also be directed by the ISU.

Additionally, as many as 5,000 private security officers are being hired to assist in venue security through a \$97 million contract with Contemporary Security Canada Inc., a Vancouver company that will expand from 59 staff members to more than 200 to handle the recruitment and management process in the months leading up to the Games.

Given that hotel space is already at a premium, with more than 350,000 visitors expected during the Olympics, where will these thousands of security personnel all stay? This has been one of the biggest challenges for the ISU, but it managed to come up with a creative solution: two cruise ships docked in Vancouver’s harbor. They won’t be the only ones—at least one other luxury liner will serve as a floating hotel with room for more than 2,500 guests.

But with the H1N1 flu so much in the news these days, the idea of having so many people sleeping in such close quarters brings to mind health concerns.

“Pandemic plans are in place,” Edwards said reassuringly. “Precautions will be made for sanitizing and cleanliness. Vaccinations will be available.”

Military involvement

Beyond the 6,000 police and 5,000 private security personnel, the 2010 Olympics security contingent will also include 4,500 Canadian Forces personnel.

Acronyms in this article

- BC—British Columbia
- CCTV—Closed-circuit television
- CSIS—Canadian Security Intelligence Service
- ISU—Integrated Security Unit
- MCDVs—Maritime Coastal Defense Vessels
- NORAD—North American Aerospace Defense Command
- PIDS—Perimeter intrusion detection services
- RCMP—Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- RHIVs—Rigid-hulled inflatable vessels
- VANOC—Vancouver Organizing Committee
- VPD—Vancouver Police Department

According to Major Dan Thomas, an Army Reservist working as a public affairs officer with Joint Task Force Games, “Our mandate is to support the RCMP with specific Olympic security within the ISU mandate, but we have no mandate to engage in what the police call ‘public engagement.’”

That means military personnel will not be seen on Vancouver streets or as part of security forces at venues. Rather, Thomas explained, “We have aircraft and ships that provide capabilities to project security around the Games. We have connectivity with NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command], which is vitally important for aerospace security, and we will have some soldiers involved in the outer perimeter security for three back-country venues, but not urban ones.”

The forces involved in Operation Podium will include regular and reserve soldiers, sailors and air personnel, Thomas elaborated. “We are establishing some temporary accommodation facilities using winterized BC Ministry of Forest and Range fire camps.” Given the exciting, specialized nature of the job, Thomas said they are not having any trouble filling out the contingent: “Reserve soldiers are volunteering in plenty of strength to fill their positions.”

Thomas said there will certainly be a military presence in the skies and on the seas around Vancouver. “Griffin helicopters will be used in air mobility both for the police and the military getting people into remote areas and out again as required.”

Fighter jets usually appear over Vancouver only during the nearby Abbotsford Air Show each summer, but because of a heightened level of NORAD security,

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Thomas said CF-18 Hornets (based on the American F/A-18 Hornet) will be a common sight. Although the nearest permanent fighter base is Cold Lake, Alberta, more than 1,000 km (600 miles) away, they will also stage out of Comox across the Georgia Strait on Vancouver Island (138 km or 86 miles as the jet flies) and other local airports as needed.

“Other aircraft and helicopters would include Sea Kings, Cormorants for search and rescue and Aurora reconnaissance aircraft,” Thomas said, adding that “the Aurora is a four-engine turboprop, related to the Orion platform” used by the US Navy.

In the water, “We will have everything from Zodiac-sized RHIVs, rigid-hulled inflatable vessels, that would augment police boats of a similar type. We will have Orca-class training vessels used operationally, Maritime Coastal Defense Vessels, or MCDVs. Bigger hulls—Canadian Patrol Frigates, potentially a destroyer.”

In other words, as Thomas noted after a pause, “The whole spectrum of Canadian Forces capabilities is available as required.”

Venue security

According to Thomas, the ISU is responsible for venue security, as well as the “protection of the athletes, officials and Olympic families. Anything outside the venue, out on the streets, out in the celebration sites, that’s the [Vancouver] police force’s jurisdiction.” The ISU refers to this as the “urban domain.”

When VANOC takes control of the venues in the weeks leading up to the Games, the ISU will erect a fence around each venue and conduct a security sweep to make sure it is locked down.

“Basically, it’s the same for each and every venue,” Edwards explained. “The terrain will be different and the resources for each venue will be different, depending on the size and location, but basically it’s the same principles.”

To support venue security, the ISU has entered into a \$30.5 million contract with Honeywell Canada to provide a perimeter intrusion detection services (PIDS) system for all the locations that need to be secured—27 km (17 miles) in total of perimeter security. The contract includes the installation, maintenance and removal of the equipment. ISU personnel will operate the PIDS system during the Games, with Honeywell staff providing system maintenance and support.

The perimeter security includes approximately 900 closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras to be installed at the venues, all of which will be removed following the Games. Another 50 to 70 CCTV cameras will be erected within the urban domain by the VPD.

Magnetometers (metal detectors) will be in place at all venues (the contract to provide them was not finalized at press time).

“It’s basically what you’d see at an airport,” Edwards explained. “You’ll go through the metal detectors and have your bags checked.”

Ahead of the games

There are also a few security concerns that the ISU has had to manage in the months leading up to the Games.

Primarily, anyone who will have access to secure zones within venues and facilities during the Olympics needs to be checked out and accredited. This includes athletes, coaches, media, volunteers and others. While generally a personally non-invasive process, it is estimated that more than 100,000 people will require accreditation prior to the Games.

Another challenge was the Olympic Torch Relay, which began Oct. 30, 2009, in Victoria, BC’s capital city. By the end of its 106-day journey, the torch will have visited more than 1,000 communities all throughout Canada. During the 45,000-km (28,000-mile) trip, the torch and its bearers were accompanied by the ISU’s Torch Relay Security Team, comprising members of the RCMP and other police services from across Canada.

Members of the team ran alongside the torchbearer to protect the individual and the flame and were also part of the accompanying support convoy. A small command group traveled across the country, while other members were divided into smaller groups, with each group responsible for one geographic area of the relay.

On just the second day of the torch relay, several hundred anti-Olympic activists managed to block streets in Victoria long enough to force the organizers to change the designated route at the last minute, disappointing residents who had come out to see the torchbearers go by, but thrilling protesters who claimed a victory in their attempt to disrupt the Games.

Protest and disruption

Not everyone in Vancouver is happy that the city is hosting the Winter Olympics. Even as VANOC was making its final proposals to the International Olympic Committee back in 2003, the level of dissent was significant enough for the city government to hold an expensive plebiscite asking voters: “Do you support or

do you oppose the City of Vancouver's participation in hosting the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Winter Games?"

While 64 percent of voters gave the Games their thumbs-up, more than 48,000 Vancouverites voted against it—a sign that a significant population opposed it. Mainly, those who voted “no” complain that the government seems to have no problem finding billions of dollars to pay for what is essentially just a big party after saying for years that it cannot afford to fix the city's significant homelessness problem or improve health care.

Vancouver's Downtown East Side, infamously described as “Canada's poorest postal code,” is a neighborhood that was once a core shopping district, but since the 1980s has suffered from significant urban decay. Now, it is best known for a high incidence of poverty, rampant drug abuse, homelessness, prostitution and related crime. It is a major worry to those who are concerned about how Vancouver will look under the scrutiny of the international media during the Games, and Olympics critics and poverty advocates have expressed concern that there will be some sort of police crackdown designed to clean up the area.

In response to this issue, RCMP Assistant Commissioner Bud Mercer, head of the ISU, repeatedly said, “What is legal now will be legal during the Games.”

That may be true, but Laura Track, a lawyer who works with Pivot Legal Society, pointed out that certain illegal activities—

many related to prostitution and the drug trade—are currently tolerated (except in extreme situations).

“Enforcement of those laws is definitely applied in a discretionary way by police officers,” Track argued, “so I think it is legitimate for people to fear a major crackdown on things that are currently not enforced as strongly.”

Significant protest is expected during the Games, and some of the more militant protest groups have said they will do anything they can to disrupt the Olympics.

Mercer said that he is confident the ISU is ready to handle any and all protests. “I think we have the right balance. It's measured. It's flexible. If things change, we very quickly can ramp up. And if things don't change and remain where they are today, we can settle back a little bit.

“It would be very easy to make it so secure that nothing would happen,” he continued, “but I don't think that's the image that anybody wants to be left with when they think about Canada. It's finding the balance between the right amount of security, but still keeping the focus on the sport and celebration.”

Keeping the focus on sport and celebration sounds right. That will probably be the biggest challenge the ISU faces—not letting “the largest security operation in Canadian history” overshadow the Olympic Games themselves. **HST**

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Seeking a smooth ride on the US side

When the Vancouver Olympic games open on Feb. 12 and vehicular traffic heads northward over the US-Canadian border, US authorities expect “a busy summer day in the middle of winter,” as Michele James, director for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) field operations for Seattle, Wash., put it to *Homeland Security Today*. “We have four crossing points. A busy summer day is about 45,000 vehicles. That's what we're preparing for. Based on what we're hearing, it's what we expect.”

US preparations for the event have been going on for several years.

“This is a Canadian event, and most of the travel will be within Canada,” she continued, but “we're making sure we have the right protocols in place. Over the past year, we made sure we'd have the right staffing levels, which we increased by 20 percent, and have the appropriate specialists.”

A Washington state Olympic security subcommittee oversees the planning, development and build-out of the effort, and an Olympic Task Force Security Subcommittee was formed to coordinate federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. A US-based Olympic Coordination Center was completed in June in a warehouse in Bellingham, Wash., to house the over 20 different agencies coordinating the security effort.

Department of Homeland Security components involved include the Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Border Patrol and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Both tabletop and physical exercises have been conducted by both US and Canadian forces, including Olympic Prism, headed by FEMA, which simulated a mass migration scenario at the border and the response.

The General Services Administration, which is responsible for physical infrastructure improvements, is installing additional checkpoint booths to speed traffic at the Lynden and Sumas crossings, in addition to a crossing at Blaine.

All these preparations are intended to speed throughput at the border, but a big potential bottleneck remains public compliance with the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. The initiative requires travelers to have the proper documentation, and there will be no relaxation of requirements for the sake of the games. People crossing the border still have to show a passport, a passport card and an enhanced driver's license or a Nexus card, a trusted traveler document that can speed processing time from 50 seconds to 16. A media campaign in the Seattle area scheduled for launch in the Thanksgiving timeframe was intended to alert the public to the security requirements.

“It's a high-profile event,” observed Marshal. “That being the case, obviously, we need to be situationally aware, and that's what we're telling our officers. Someone may be trying to take advantage and try to slip through, so situational awareness is important. We're telling the public to have documents and have knowledge of what can and cannot be brought into the US and what has to be declared. We're working with the US Department of Agriculture, putting out information about food products. We're trying to build some awareness there. We don't want people to get hung up at the border.”

—DAVID SILVERBERG, EDITOR