

The games face huge anti-terrorism costs and this factor may decide future venues. Duncan Mackay reports from Athens

Senior officials of the International Olympic Committee left the heavily guarded Arion Astir Palace here yesterday after three days of intense meetings claiming they were satisfied with security arrangements for the 2004 Olympics.

The Greek government has put a three-year security plan in place which envisages the creation of an Olympics elite force, comprising members of the world's best security organisations. It will include officials from Scotland Yard, the CIA and Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, and an extensive surveillance and intelligence system. More than 50,000 soldiers, sailors and police officers will be employed to protect athletes, officials and spectators during the 16 days of competition.

How draconian security will be during the games was illustrated during the latest visit of the IOC's 43-member co-ordination commission following the terrorist attacks in the United States. A ring of steel was thrown around the five-star hotel where the meetings took place, with armed police officers mingling with guests. Sven-Goran Eriksson, the England football manager who stayed here while attending Arsenal's Champions League match on Wednesday, was among those forced to queue for several minutes while his bag was checked at the hotel entrance.

All this comes at a high price — in Greece's case \$750m (£510m). For a country of only 10m people and an economy that still lags behind most of the European Union, that represents a colossal figure and the government has asked the EU for help. "Olympics security is not a Greek issue, it's an international issue," said the deputy sports minister George Floridis.

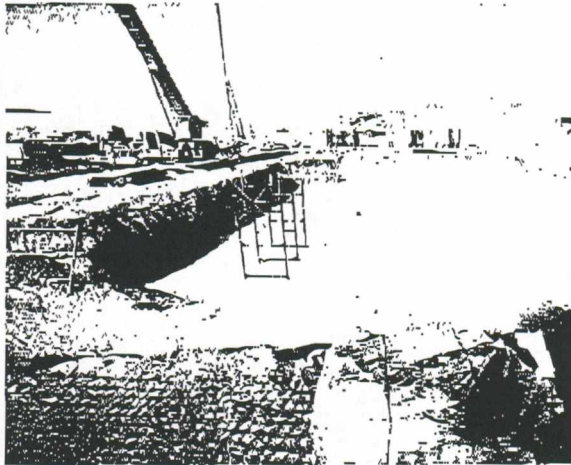
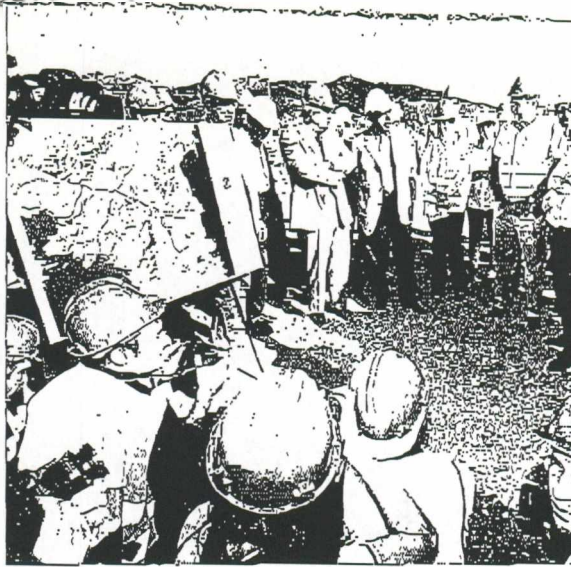
Even the security budget for the 2002 Salt Lake City winter Olympics, which has a much lower profile and involves fewer competitors than its summer counterpart, recently passed the \$200m mark.

Greece is the smallest country to host the Olympics since Finland in 1952 when Helsinki staged the games but, as security costs continue to spiral upwards, it could soon be that only the major European and North American cities could even consider staging them.

Among the cities interested in staging the 2012 games, it has been reported that Budapest is having second thoughts following the terrorist attack in the US. "We have to look at whether it is still worth it," said a government official from Hungary, a country similar in size and wealth to Greece.

When Jacques Rogge was elected president of the IOC in July, one of his pledges was to reduce the size of the games so that they could be more accessible to countries such as Greece and Hungary. One of Rogge's ambitions is to encourage a serious bid from Africa, which has never staged the Olympics. The only country realistically rich enough to even consider bidding is South Africa, but Olympic officials from there admit privately they could not afford to stage the games at present.

"It is all very well of Jacques having the idea of downsizing the games so that more countries might be able to host



Above, the IOC president Jacques Rogge holds a press conference on security with the president of the Greek organising committee Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki; above right and top, IOC members inspect progress on construction of the Athens athletes' village

them," said Craig Reddie, Britain's IOC member. "But if the security bill keeps going up then it rather defeats the object."

Increased security costs could even affect London's expected bid for the 2012 Olympics. The British Olympic Association will soon appoint a management company to do a cost-benefit analysis but Reddie admits the figure budgeted for security will have to be reviewed — especially as London figures near the top of many terrorists' assumed hit lists. "It all adds to the costs," Reddie said. "It is not going to be easy."

Security has been of paramount importance to the IOC since September 1972 when 11 Israelis were killed at the Munich Olympics. The IOC is well aware that it organises the world's biggest television spectacular and that the games are an attractive target for terrorists.

Until Munich, security was relatively relaxed. By the time the Montreal games

Olympics pay a high price for security

The Guardian Saturday September 29 2001

Focus

The Guardian Saturday September 29 2001

were held four years later the character of the Olympics had changed completely forever. "I competed in Montreal and security people wore army fatigues and carried machine guns," said Anita De-Frantz, a former Olympic rower who is now an IOC member for the US.

The games will have an even more militarised look in Salt Lake City and Athens. It is planned to have US Air Force fighter jets circling the Utah sky to prevent a repeat of what happened in New York, while in Athens the Greek air force will be in charge of the new international airport.

Adding to the sense of foreboding surrounding Salt Lake City is the fact that when the games were last held on American soil, the 1996 Atlanta summer Olympics, the event was disrupted by a bomb that killed two people and injured dozens.

The Athens games may be three years away but the security issue is crucial to the Greeks, who have been keen to improve their image after a series of deadly attacks by leftist urban guerrillas.

Greece has long been seen as Europe's "soft underbelly" — a place where terrorists strike with impunity. In 1999, it led the continent in the number of anti-US terrorist attacks.

The infamy is owed almost solely to the failure of Greek authorities to apprehend any member of the November 17 faction. This extreme-left group, named after the date of the abortive 1973 students' uprising against the so-called Colonels' regime, has killed 22 people — influential Greeks, American, British, Turkish and Arab diplomats and military personnel — since emerging in 1975.

Rogge, a former yachtsman for Belgium, competed in Munich and so knows how serious the threat of terrorism is to the Olympic movement. "What happened

in New York has not awakened the International Olympic Committee for a need for top security arrangements," he said. "Since 1972, the IOC has always put priority number one on security.

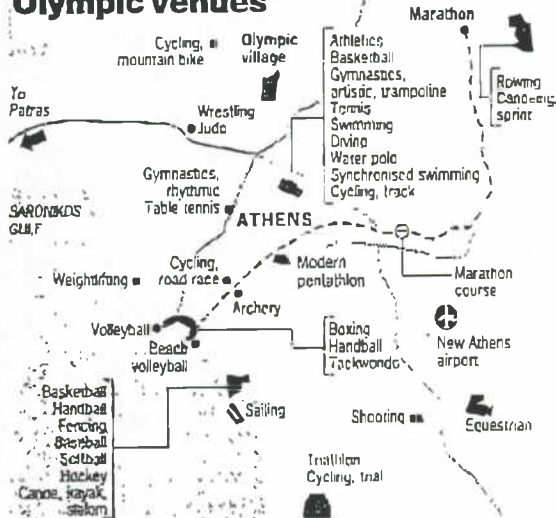
"We can never promise 100% security. No one can. However, we can pledge that all efforts that are humanly possible will be in place."

The Olympic movement has been in this position before. After Munich no one wanted to hold a spent match let alone a lighted torch to the games. It recovered then, and Rogge is determined the games will not bow to the threat of terrorism.

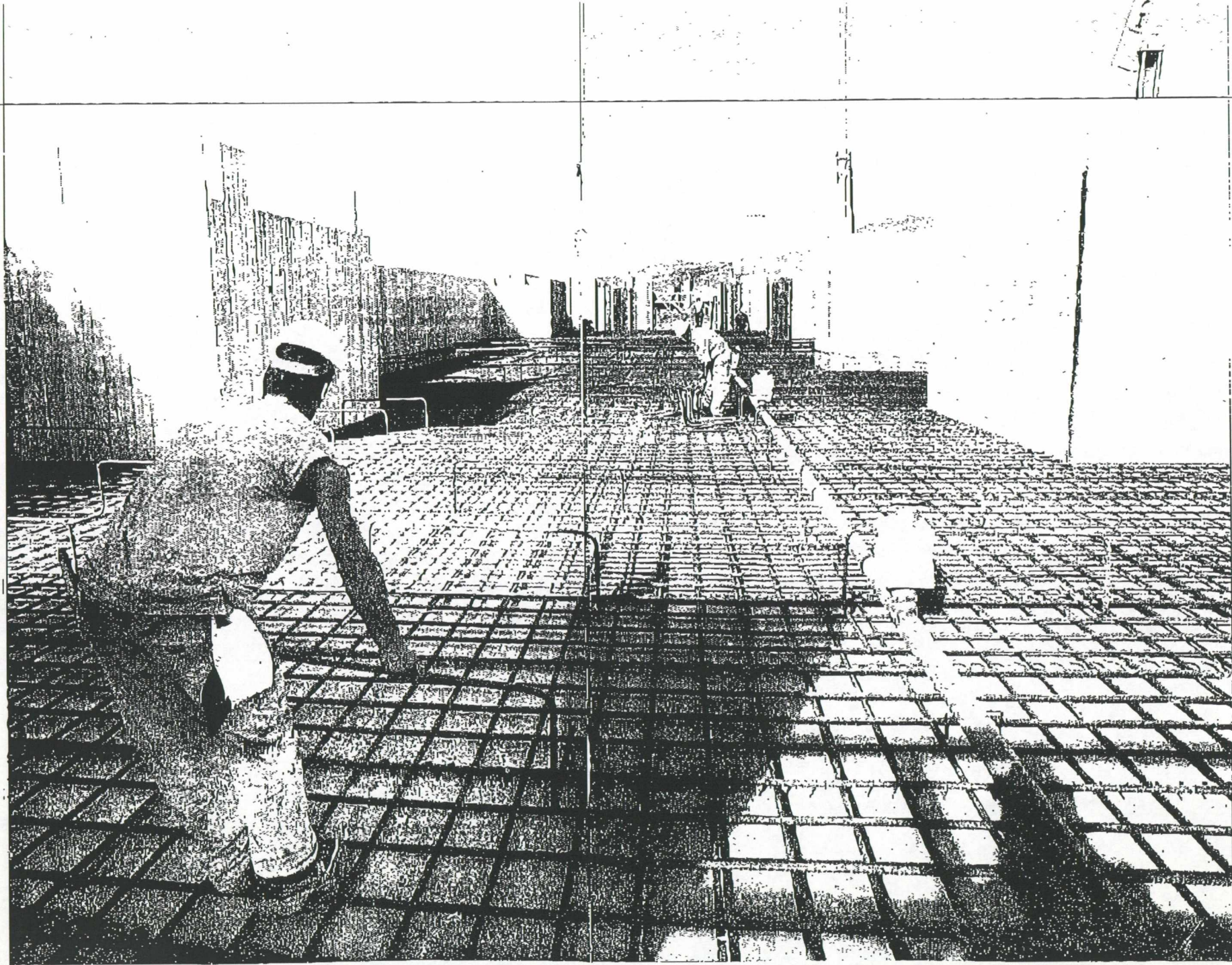
"The Olympic Games are the best message of brotherhood, fraternity and universality," he said. "There is no better symbol of the world uniting around the cause."

The question is, how many cities can afford the security costs that now go with that symbol?

Olympic venues



2



3