

Running a Political Campaign through the Olympics: Carter and the Boycott of  
the 1980 Summer Olympics

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## Introduction

Avery Brundage, the fifth president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and one of the most prominent figures in the history of the Modern Olympic Games, was famous for his constant espousal of what he believed to be the most important principle of the Olympic Games, “namely, that sport [should be] completely free of politics.”<sup>1</sup> The history of sports in general, and the Olympic Games specifically, illustrates just how false this conviction was. Although, modern sport evolved in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily as a leisurely pastime in which athletes participated merely for the love of sport, sport rapidly began to gain significance in multiple spheres of life, including economic and political domains. Consequently, the Olympic Games became more than just a pastime; they became a serious venture not only for the athletes, but for the businesses, media, spectators, and nation-states.<sup>2</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the international community ascribed great importance to sports, especially to the Olympic Games, as an instrument for propaganda and as a means to achieve political ends. Richard Espy explained that this prominent view of sports was evident by “the number of people who watch and participate, the increase in media attention over the years, the passions aroused worldwide on behalf of the competitors and, most convincing, through the controversies created within the Olympics which reflect trends in international relations over time.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, sports no longer represented a physical competition, but held importance in politics as a tool that could be manipulated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Paddick, “Sport and Politics: The (Gross) Anatomy of Their Relationships,” *Sporting Traditions*, 1985, <http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/SportingTraditions/1985/st0102/st0102f.pdf>, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 5.

government as a form of warfare, and in consumer culture as a form of mass entertainment.

Richard Espy captured one of the key aspects of the relationship between sports and politics by describing sport as an instrument for diplomacy; “by sending delegations of athletes abroad, states can establish a first basis for diplomatic relations or can more effectively maintain such relations.”<sup>4</sup> This was the foundation of the Soviets’ desire to join the Olympic movement. Although the Marxist ideology of the Soviet Union detested modern sport for its triviality and its distraction from the workers’ revolution, the Soviet Union ultimately joined the International Olympic movement because it began to understand the centrality of sports in international relations. Similarly, other nations such as Cuba and China, commenced international sport relations to signal their desire for closer diplomatic relations with the West.<sup>5</sup> The cultural life, namely sports, was a crucial aspect of determining a nation’s image and reputation in the eyes of the international community.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Olympic movement was founded on the ideal of bringing people together in a way that transcended divisions of class, race, religion, and nationality.<sup>7</sup> The International Olympic Committee (IOC) required the Olympic hosts to allow entry to any accredited competitor regardless of the relationship of the host nation to that competitor’s nation, thus ensuring the participation of different nations with differing religious, ideological, and political affiliations.

The role of sports in national and international politics involved more than just the government officials immersed in the daily political life. Popular apolitical masses across

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<sup>4</sup> Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Allison, *The Politics of Sport*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Allison, *The Politics of Sport*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Lincoln Allison, *The Politics of Sport* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 14.

the world were equally as invested in sporting life as the nations' political leaders. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of sports provided an escape and distraction for the masses from their workday routines. For workers who did not participate in sport, they resorted to the next best thing: watching sports and getting the thrill of vicarious participation through cheering on their favorite athletes.<sup>8</sup> The pervasive nationalism that dominated the Modern Olympic Games from its inception escalated in the modern age of radio, television, and commercialization. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of mass media, a big aspect of our daily routine revolves around sports whether or not we are fully aware of it. Many Americans have played sports at some point in their lives, read the sports section in the newspaper, watched athletes compete either on television or live, looked forward to the Olympic Games, or entered March Madness brackets and Fantasy Football leagues. These examples are just a few of the ways our daily lives are deeply influenced by the integration of sports into our modern consumer culture.

The role of the media in broadcasting sports intensified after 1960. From that point on, the media functioned in a more involved capacity. The media, specifically television, played an important part in bringing sports to the masses, and altered the role that sports played in American lives.<sup>9</sup> One of the main functions of the media was to entertain the populace using new media technologies to communicate with a vast number of people.<sup>10</sup> Watching sports allowed the fans to become so emotionally invested in the games, that they become inseparable from the players and together cheer against their opponents. In this way, the spectators experience upward mobility through the athletes by vicariously

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<sup>8</sup> Don Calhoun, *Sports Culture and Personality* (West Point: Leisure Press, 1981), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *In Its Own Image* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>10</sup> David Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 28.

identifying with their successes.<sup>11</sup> Barry Lorge of the *Washington Post* gave a comprehensive definition of the function of spectator sports;

Spectator sports at its best is a splendid form of escapism, a cathartic amalgam of art, drama, and passion that lifts us and takes us on an emotional bobsled run. It thrills and fascinates us, dazzles us with skill, excites our sense of what the human body can do, fulfills our hopes and dreams, breaks our hearts, makes us hold our breath and, ultimately, leaves us richer for the experience, win or lose. It makes us feel better about our heroes and ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

Watching sports on television allowed for a release from the stress of work, while at the same time fulfilling the spectator's desire for fun. Sports remind people about the permanence of some things amid the interruptions of daily life, while acting as a unifying force for Americans.<sup>13</sup>

With the commercial broadcasting of the Olympic Games, the competition was no longer solely for the athletes, but it became a major spectacle for the masses to enjoy. Television rights to broadcast the Olympic Games were purchased for large sums of money because public interest in the Games was profitable in financial terms as well as prestige. Espy suggested that, "for the spectator it is highly significant to have the team win or the nation triumph, to feel vicarious identification with the individual athletes and their successes and failures."<sup>14</sup> Through media exposure, the audience of spectators grew tremendously, and thus the nationalism and patriotism of non-athletes grew worldwide. Citizens watched the Olympics on television, and felt a great sense of pride and victory as they watched their national flag being raised with their national anthem playing loudly throughout the arena.

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<sup>11</sup> Calhoun, *Sports Culture and Personality*, 306.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Lorge, "1980: Despaire Fades in a Hockey Team's Glow," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147052352/C593B9CD7C32493FPQ/46?accountid=10226>.

<sup>13</sup> Calhoun, *Sports Culture and Personality*.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 5.

The continual rise of nationalism in the Olympic Games, due largely to the media, strengthened the political influence on the Games. Although politics were always inextricably linked to the Olympic movement, the increasing prominence of the Olympic Games ushered in an era of more overt political actions that threatened to overpower and destroy the Olympic movement. Delivering the welcome address for the 75<sup>th</sup> International Olympic Committee (IOC) conference in Vienna in 1974, Lord Killanin, president of the IOC, expressed his grave concerns

not only for the Olympic Games, but for sport in general. The greatest of these is the fact that the athlete is forgotten except at the moment he stands victorious on the podium. The Games are for the athletes; their performances have been encouraged by spectators in the arena and throughout the world on television. Frequently the athletes are becoming not only victims of commercial exploitation and temptation, but also of political maneuvering.<sup>15</sup>

This conference was the same conference in which Moscow was awarded host of the 1980 Summer Games and, unfortunately, Lord Killanin's anxieties foreshadowed the events that would take place surrounding the 1980 Games.

Just as attending the Olympic Games showed a level of international cooperation, so too, not attending the Games, or boycotting the Games, indicated disapproval with a specific government or its policies.<sup>16</sup> Even within a boycott movement, international relationships and politics proved to be critical. Particularly with the 1980 U.S.-led boycott against Moscow, the boycott was divisive, as it separated the U.S. allies from the Soviet allies. Nations' political allegiances were conveyed clearly based on their response to Carter's request to join the boycott.<sup>17</sup> The 1980 Summer Games marked a critical moment in Olympic history with the U.S.-led boycott, for the political sway was greater than it had

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<sup>15</sup> 1974 conference

<sup>16</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 10.



been in any previous Olympics, and the Games were given their biggest test to date to see if they could withstand and survive the heavy political influences. As we are aware, from watching and following the most recent Summer Olympic Games in Rio, the Olympic movement continued to exist and flourish, despite the 1980 boycott.

This essay delves into this critical moment in Olympic history to explore how the Olympic movement was almost destroyed, and how it was ultimately saved. The thesis looks specifically at the United-States-led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games to highlight the intervention of politics in the Olympic Games. This thesis argues that the boycott of the 1980 Games represented an infusion of politics into the Olympic Games in an unprecedented manner. The boycott was ultimately unsuccessful and failed due to a variety of reasons: Carter failed to understand the Olympic organization and proper Olympic protocol and therefore overstepped his boundaries as the President, and he also underestimated the increasingly important role that sports played in the American people's daily lives due to the expansion of sports media.

Chapter 1 is divided into two sections: the first section outlines the key moments leading up to the development of the modern Olympic movement and the revival of the Games, while the second section highlights the various overt and covert displays of politics in the Olympic Games leading up to 1980. This sets up a standard by which to compare the 1980 Games, to clearly see the discrepancies that existed between the 1980 boycott, and all of the political displays that preceded it. Chapter 2 delves into the details of the 1980 boycott and shows how the political displays of the 1980 boycott were different from any of the political displays present in previous Games, mainly in that the political influences were initiated from President Carter in a top down approach instead of from the United

States Olympic Committee. Chapter 3 explores the motivation and reasoning behind Carter's decision to utilize the Olympic Games as a political tool at this specific moment in history. Lastly, Chapter 4 discusses the consequences of the 1980 Olympic Games, and ultimately why the boycott failed.

### *Historiography*

The international renown of the Olympic Games has made it an interesting topic of scholarly research. However, given the breadth of Olympic history, it has been difficult to study each Olympic Games in depth to analyze all the intriguing components and non-sports influences on the Games. One aspect of the Olympic Games that has received particular attention from historians is the role of politics in sports. There has been much scholarly debate about the place of politics in sports, particularly in the Olympic Games. One of the major contributors to the scholarly works of politics and the Olympics is Allen Guttman, who has authored numerous books on the Olympics. His book *The Olympics* (1992) specifically discusses that politics have “*always* been a part of the Olympics. The modern games were, in fact, revived to propagate a political message.”<sup>18</sup> Although the Olympics Games were created to showcase competition between the world's most gifted athletes, they also encompassed bitter political conflicts. Guttman provides a historical account of the modern Olympic Games, highlighting the political influence that was present in each of the Games. However, Guttman groups all of these political displays into one category, and does not distinguish between the different methods and types of political

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<sup>18</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Olympics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1.

interference. Guttmann views the political factors in each Olympic Games as an inherent part of the Olympic movement, and therefore does not believe that any particular instance of political involvement threatened to destroy the Olympic movement. This thesis draws on Guttmann's accounts of political influences present in the Olympic Games, but uses early examples to differentiate the 1980 Olympics to show why these Olympic Games were particularly unique.

Richard Espy is another historian who has contributed significantly to the research of the intersection between politics and the Olympic Games. In *The Politics of the Olympic Games* (1979), Espy argues that the nations of the world have historically participated in the Olympic Games as an opportunity to express national identities. The Olympics take on the same characteristics that other international organizations do, and thus "the Olympics mirror the international structure among nations."<sup>19</sup> Espy focuses on the period 1944-1976 to examine the influence of the Olympic Games on the international scene, particularly with regard to nationalism and nation-state formation. Espy argues that the Olympic Games were used to gain national recognition for countries particularly in the cases of Germany, China, South Africa, and Rhodesia. His work focuses solely on the Olympic Games' impact on nationalism and international recognition of nation-states by discussing the questions surrounding the decisions on whether or not to allow certain nations to compete, or to join the IOC. Furthermore, the first edition of this book was published prior to the 1980 Summer Games, and thus did not include a detailed account of the Games around which this thesis is focused. In the case of the Soviet Union and the United States, both of these countries were not only recognized nations, but were arguably two of the biggest

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, viii.

superpowers at that time, and therefore, the political involvement in these Games has little to do with trying to obtain recognition as a nation.

While there have been a variety of works about the history of the modern Olympic Games, as well as the history of political involvement in the Olympic Games, most of these works have provided broad accounts of the Olympic Games. There has been a substantial amount of research surrounding the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, but no other Olympic Games has received as much scholarly attention. The breadth of the Olympic Games discussed in most of the works on the Olympics do not allow for an in depth analysis of any one of the Olympiads, and instead focus more on the Olympic movement and the political implications they convey as a whole. While there are many trends that are visible through studying the Olympic Games as a complete movement, I believe that there are distinctive features about the Olympiads that need to be studied individually to reveal the problems and national/international political influences and consequences.

Although most of the individual Olympic Games are lacking in extended research, the scholarly research surrounding the 1980 Olympic Games is particularly scarce partly due to the recentness of these Games. The most important contribution to the study of the 1980 Olympic Games is Nicholas Sarantakes' work, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (2011). Sarantakes argues that the Carter administration was unaware of how the International Olympic Committee functioned, and therefore did not follow proper protocol with regard to the boycott. However, Sarantakes claimed that it was not Carter who led the boycott of the Games, but his advisors who believed that a boycott was necessary and thus convinced Carter that it was the best option. Ultimately, Sarantakes argues that it was the boycott of the 1980 Games that escalated the Cold War

and broke down the détente, rather than the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This thesis takes a similar approach in outlining the steps that were taken to boycott the 1980 Games to show that the government did not follow proper protocol and overexerted its influence on the USOC. However, I argue that it was Carter who employed the boycott, not his advisors, and he did so for reasons beyond the invasion of Afghanistan. This thesis focuses on the domestic effects of the boycott, instead of the effect on the U.S.-Soviet relations.

The 1980 Olympic Games was also a major focus of the work of Barukh Hazan in *Olympic Sports and Propaganda Games: Moscow 1980* (1982). Hazan uses his analysis of the 1980 Games to show conclusively that sport is not only influenced by politics, but it is in fact itself a form of politics. Hazan looks at the 1980 Games from the Soviet point of view by contextualizing the 1980 Games in terms of Soviet sport history. Hazan shows how the Soviets used the 1980 Games as propaganda, particularly in their desire to host the Games.

Christopher Hill argues in *Olympic Politics* (1992) “governments do not merely use sport as a means of projecting a national image abroad, but in order to achieve social and political objectives at home.”<sup>20</sup> Specifically, Hill follows a similar pattern of thought as Hazan, and focuses on the decision for countries to bid for the honor of hosting the Olympic Games, and the selection of host cities. This thesis draws on Hill’s notion to look beyond the ramifications of politics in the Olympic Games on international relations, but takes a different direction to explore what domestic aims the Carter administration was trying to achieve in its boycott against the 1980 Olympic Games.

A main source base for my thesis, as well as the main reason for my interest in the topic, is the media. With the invention of television and the broadcasting of sports, the

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

media played an increasingly influential role in sports. Benjamin Rader in *In its Own Image* (1984) argued that television trivialized the experience of spectator sports, and “diluted the poignancy and potency of the sporting experience. It has diminished the capacity of sports to furnish heroes, to bind communities, and to enact the rituals that contain, and exalt, society’s traditional values.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Guttman and Hill both discuss the negative effects the media has had on sports. This thesis takes a vastly different approach; it argues that rather than destroying and trivializing the Olympics, the media played an important role in saving the Olympics during the 1980 Games.

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This essay acknowledges the substantial history of the Olympic Games that highlights the strong connection between sports and politics. However, I focus specifically on the events surrounding and relating to the 1980 Olympic boycott led by President Carter. Previous works on the Olympic Games have discussed the political influences on the Games in terms of international relations. Even the discussion of nation forming through the Olympic Games was done in the context of international recognition, rather than domestic nationalism. This work shifts the focus of political influence on the Olympic Games from the international sphere to the domestic. Although the U.S. boycott against the Moscow Games can easily be construed as a surrogate war waged during the height of the Cold War, this thesis explores the other uses for the boycott. Instead of using the boycott as a form of foreign policy against the Soviets, it was actually used to bolster domestic policy, and thus ultimately had a greater effect on the United States’ domestic political life, than on the Moscow Games or international relations. Public opinion also plays a major role in this

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *In Its Own Image*, 6.

essay's discussion of political influence on the Olympic Games. Due to the rising mass appeal of the Olympic Games, the public was just as instrumental in the political decisions of the 1980 boycott as the President and other government officials. Ultimately, this essay explores the role the spectators played in saving the Olympic movement.

## Chapter 1: The Role of Politics in the Modern Day Olympics

One of the aims of the modern Olympic movement as stated in the Olympic Charter is to “educate young people through sport in a spirit of better understanding between each other and of friendship, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world.”<sup>22</sup> By using sport to attain peaceful relationships between nations, politics were implicitly inserted into the Olympic realm. This chapter discusses two main aspects of the Olympic Games. First, it summarizes the events surrounding the creation of the modern Olympic Games, analyzing the context for its conception, and the reasons why it was created. Second, the chapter discusses the history of political involvement in the modern Olympic Games. This discussion will serve as a point of comparison for the United States’ political involvement in the 1980 Summer Games.

### *History of the Foundation of the Modern Olympic Movement*

Since the glory of the Olympic Games had its roots in Ancient Greece, it was conceivable that the movement to revive the Olympic Games first arose in Greece. Panagiotos Soutsos, a young Greek poet, was the first to propose a revival of the Olympic Games to the Greek citizens and government. The Greeks had been under Turkish rule for four centuries, and after the Greek War of Independence (1821-28) and the establishment of a new Greek government, many of the Greek citizens sought ways to form a new national identity to signify the rebirth of Greece as an independent country. The Ancient Olympic

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<sup>22</sup> “Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition” (Comite International Olympique, 1980), <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1980-Olympic-Charter-Provisional.pdf>.



Games were viewed as a peak of Greek glory and thus the revival of these Games was conceived as a way to revitalize Greek glory.<sup>23</sup>

With the other European nations pulling ahead in industry and power, Soutsos saw the revival of the Olympics as a way to keep up with the other nations. However, others viewed the Olympic Games as an antiquated event that would inflict more harm than good on Greece's reputation among the more modern European countries.<sup>24</sup> The critics of reviving the Games were ultimately dismissed with the Greek royal decree in 1858 proclaiming

1) There are hereby established National Contests to be held every four years and called 'Olympics', which have as their purpose to exhibit the products of the activities of Greece, especially, industry, agriculture, and animal husbandry. 2) The Olympic Organizing Committee will be the Committee for the Encouragement of National Industry.<sup>25</sup>

The first Olympic Games failed to arouse national excitement and pride for the Games. Rangavis' lack of interest in reviving the athletic portion of the Games led to his inadequate preparation for the athletic share of the Games, resulting in a lack of publicity, attention, and attendance. The first attempt at revival of the Olympic Games was thus a failure.

Concurrently, a movement in England, spearheaded by Dr. William Penny Brookes, emerged dedicated to creating an organization similar to the Olympic Games. Brookes was dedicated to the working class, and in 1840 he established a society to encourage the working class to read more to improve their minds. However, Brookes was not merely

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<sup>23</sup>Through his writing, Soutsos proposed a reestablishment of the Olympic games, not just as a restoration of the athletic competition, but also as a broader movement representing culture and education. His hope was that these competitions would foster feelings of community and brotherhood among its participants, and create a pathway for international peace. These were the same ideals that were later adopted by the International Olympic Committee upon the establishment of the Games.

<sup>24</sup> David C. Young, *The Modern Olympics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4. Rangavis, a Greek poet and intellectual, believed that athletics were not a worthwhile pursuit in modern times and hearkened a throwback to the primitive ancient times.

<sup>25</sup> Young, *The Modern Olympics*, 14.

invested in their educational development, but in their physical improvement as well; in 1850, he formed a subgroup of his organization, the Wenlock Olympian Class (WOC). The “Olympics Class” competed in annual competitions that proved to be extremely successful and popular in England.<sup>26</sup>

Upon hearing the news of the revival of the 1859 Greek games, Brookes was imbued with fresh enthusiasm and spirit for the Olympic Games and wanted to progress his own Olympic movement in England. Enthusiasm for the revival of the Olympic Games spread throughout England, and various Olympic committees sprung up in different English cities. In 1865, the various Olympic committees united to create a unified national Olympic movement; the British Olympic Association was formed and given the name the National Olympian Association to signify the national representation of the new committee.<sup>27</sup> Strong opposition to this national committee proved to be a great obstacle in the success of the revival of the modern Olympics. The idea that sports could be controlled from anywhere outside London was inconceivable to upper-class men of London. As a result they formed a counter-Olympic movement entitled the Amateur Athletic Club (AAC). The AAC worked tirelessly to boycott the annual British Olympic Games, and in 1868, they succeeded in mounting a boycott that impeded the games and discouraged the NOA from attempting to hold any more National Olympics.<sup>28</sup> Although Brookes’ plans for holding National Games were resisted, he devoted his energy to advocating for physical education in schools and promoting the ideal of an international Olympic games.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>27</sup> David Goldblatt, *The Games* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 23. The name was later changed to the British Olympic Committee

<sup>28</sup> Young, *The Modern Olympics*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Young, *The Modern Olympics*, 54. In 1874, Brookes proposed that the government promote physical education, specifically gymnastics, in elementary schools.

Around the time that the British had seemingly given up on the revival of the Olympics, Greece held their second modern day Olympic games in 1870, which proved to be more successful than the failed Games held in 1866. This triumph restored hope that a revival of the Games was indeed possible, but it was short-lived as yet another intense opposition mounted. In Greece, many citizens still subscribed to anti-athletic sentiments; they firmly believed that in modern times, where technology had replaced the soldier on the battlefield, physical development and athleticism no longer held the same importance and value. For the 1875 Games, the stadiums were not renovated or fixed from the 1870 Games, attendance was poor, and the event was overall a complete disappointment.<sup>30</sup> The dismal failure of the 1875 Greek Olympic Games further encouraged the anti-athletic criticism.

Despite the early Olympic visionaries and their attempts to revive the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin was credited with the revival and remains the most important figure of the modern Olympic Games. Coubertin was a Frenchman born to an aristocratic family, and had been a child when France suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870 during the fight for the unification of Germany. Coubertin initially considered a military career, but had rejected this career path and instead chose to pursue a career as an educator and propagandist. He devoted most of his energy to the Olympic movement.<sup>31</sup>

Coubertin believed that the French defeat was not due to the poor military guidance under Napoleon III, but instead could be attributed to the physical inferiority of the French

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<sup>30</sup> Goldblatt, *The Games*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Young, *The Modern Olympics*, 69.

youth in comparison to their German opponents. Coubertin believed that French physical inferiority was a consequence of the lack of statewide physical education for the French youth. While the French had no form of national physical education, the Germans had a nationalistic gymnastics program called Turnen, which served as the basis of physical education for youth in German public schools; it combined typical scholarly studies with physical exercise.<sup>32</sup> However, it was not only in Germany that there was an emphasis on physical fitness. Coubertin noticed that England followed a similar program and advocated for sports in a school setting because sports seemed to play a role in both the development of the boys' moral character and physical abilities. On a visit to the United States in 1889, Coubertin observed that physical education was also a prominent feature of their schools, and intercollegiate sports played a big role in life at university and among the nation of spectators. Coubertin utilized his abilities as a propagandist to convince the French that they should emulate the other leading countries' model of introducing sport into their schooling system to provide physical education to the youth of France.<sup>33</sup>

As Coubertin worked to develop this model of physical fitness, he came to the realization that modern technology had played a role in transforming the world into a "global village." Yet, xenophobia still continued to play a prominent role in each nation's mindset, hindering the development of international cooperation. Coubertin was drawn to the vision of a peaceful world. He was interested in using sports to forge an international community and create international cooperation and peace.

Part of Coubertin's success in reviving the Olympic Games was a result of his strategy as a propagandist. While Soutsos and Brookes were largely concerned with

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<sup>32</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Olympics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Guttman, *The Olympics*, 9-10.

reviving the Olympics in their respective countries, they had little success in internationalizing the event. Brookes envisioned international games, but did little to promote this vision. Coubertin, on the other hand, traveled to different countries to meet with various sports officials to discuss the possibility and logistics of a revival of the Olympic Games. He arranged a conference with seventy-eight delegates from nine countries to convince them to support his Olympic ideals.<sup>34</sup> This conference was used to confirm the details of the Olympic Games and establish how these games would proceed. It was at this conference that the delegates suggested to Coubertin that he establish an International Olympic Committee (IOC) to make sure the Games were as politically independent as possible.<sup>35</sup>

Coubertin suggested to Demetrios Vikelas, the Greek delegate in the IOC, that it was only fitting for the first modern Olympic Games to be held in Athens, the site of the Ancient Games. Vikelas enthusiastically accepted this proposal, and also became the first president of the IOC.<sup>36</sup> Although Vikelas was elated with the prospect of Greece hosting the first international revival of the Olympic Games, the Greek people were not as enthusiastic about the endeavor. The financial burden of hosting the games was strongly felt in Greece, and the organizing committee that had been established was incompetent and ineffective. Ultimately, the funding for the Games was secured and the stadiums and facilities in Athens were prepared for the Games. Although the teams from other countries that competed in the 1896 Olympic Games were quite small, the revival was ultimately a major success. Nations had been concerned about the effects international competition and cooperation

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Guttman, *The Olympics*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Goldblatt, *The Games*, 41.

would have on nationalism, but countries discovered that nationalism was indeed strengthened by this international event. Even the Greeks, who had been hesitant about hosting the Games, possessed an immense amount of pride for the revival of the Games, and wanted a monopoly on the credit for the revival and on hosting all future Olympic Games. In order to maintain the universalism of the Games, the IOC decided that the Greeks should not be allowed to dominate the modern Olympics, and instead a different city should be chosen to host each successive Olympic Games.<sup>37</sup>

### *History of Political Involvement in the Modern Olympic Games*

The display of ardent nationalism in even the first modern Olympic Games was indicative of the political problems that would continue to plague the modern Olympic Games. The IOC was established to ensure the separation of sports and politics, yet this separation never really existed. The fact that the Olympic Games were established to facilitate international peace meant that politics were inextricably linked to the Games. Even though the modern Olympic Games have a relatively short history, the history of political involvement at the modern Olympic Games is pretty lengthy.

The earliest example of politics interfering with the modern Games occurred after WWI. After a hiatus from the Games during the First World War, the Olympic Games were resumed in 1920 in Belgium, a site that was undoubtedly selected to symbolize the German aggression against Belgium that had resulted in the outbreak of the World War. It was against Olympic rules to exclude nations recognized by the IOC from participating in the Games due to political reasons. However, the emotions from the First World War were still

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<sup>37</sup> Hill, *Olympic Politics*, 25.

raw, and the majority of the IOC members had fought the Germans in the war and were not keen on having them at the Olympic Games. Therefore, the IOC strongly encouraged the organizing committee, the body responsible for sending out invitations to other nations, to not extend an invitation to Germany to participate in the Games.<sup>38</sup>

As was the case with the selection of the host city for the 1920 Olympic Games, the selection of Berlin as the host city for the 1936 Games was politically motivated, proving to be just the beginning of Olympic Games rife with political undertones and international political controversy. In 1931, Berlin was awarded to host the Summer Games of 1936 as a symbol of reintegration of Germany into international sports for the first time since WWI. At the time Berlin was named as the host city, the Weimar Republic was the reigning government, and the IOC wanted to make a statement of acceptance of the democratic regime that Germany had established. However, by the time the 1936 Olympics commenced, the government had shifted, and Hitler was in power. Hitler had previously denounced modern sports because of their embodiment of equality in race and ideology in order to judge athletic excellence. Many Olympic officials were concerned Hitler would refuse to host the 1936 Games, since it symbolized the ideal of modern sports.<sup>39</sup> However, the Nazi view on sports had evolved, and as a Nazi publication stated, “Athletes and sport are the preparatory school of the political will in the service of the state.”<sup>40</sup> Hitler agreed to host the Games because he realized the great propaganda opportunity it presented to show the world the German nation’s vitality and organization.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Guttmann, *The Olympics*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Guttmann, *The Olympics*, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Roger I. Abrams, *Playing Tough The World of Sports and Politics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Philip D’Agati, *The Cold War and the 1984 Olympic Games* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 41.

Berlin's suitability as a host city began to be questioned as the discrepancies between the racist policies of the Nazi regime and the Olympic Charter became more evident. The American Olympic Committee (AOC) was worried that the Nazi doctrine would undermine the foundation of the Olympic Games, specifically in terms of restricting athletes' participation based on race, class, or religion.<sup>42</sup> An American boycott was proposed by the AOC as a possible form of action to take if Germany did not comply with the Olympic Charter. While it was evident that the IOC and the United States disapproved of the German government and policies, that was not the basis for the debate of the boycott; Germany would only be declared an unsuitable site for the Games if they were in direct violation of the provisions set out by the Olympic Charter. Thus, the IOC as well as the AOC met with several German officials and investigated the events in Germany to determine whether or not Germany was in violation of the Olympic charter. The IOC was reassured by the German assurances that any German citizen regardless of race or religion would be eligible to compete for Germany, in accordance with the official Olympic rules. However, the American contingency was less easily persuaded and conducted further research to be certain about sending a U.S team to compete. Avery Brundage, President of the American Olympic Association, visited Germany prior to the U.S acceptance of the German invitation to the Olympic Games. Brundage was satisfied with the German reassurances, and upon his return to the U.S, Brundage urged the American Olympic Committee to participate in the Olympic Games. The American Olympic Association complied with Brundage's proposition, and voted to send an Olympic team.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Against Article 3 of the Olympic Charter.

<sup>43</sup> Goldblatt, *The Games*, 175-177.



The failure of the boycott movement signified the success of the National Olympic Committees in keeping the Olympic movement separate from political influence. Although the decision was not universally accepted by the American people, the boycott attempts proved unsuccessful. Various groups in America including Jewish, Catholic, and African American groups strongly contested the Games on the basis of Nazi policies. However, their call for a boycott was unheeded because the Olympic Committee had already committed to attending, and they were the sole deciders of the American Olympic fate. Brundage argued that the boycott movement was “motivated entirely by disapproval of the German government at that time, although the German government had nothing to do with the organization or content of the Games.”<sup>44</sup> Disagreement with the host city’s politics was not grounds for a boycott of the Olympic Games in the eyes of Brundage and the IOC. Although the boycott gained traction outside of the United States, most countries were watching to see what the United States would decide to do; once the United States decided to send athletes to Berlin, other Olympic committees in Europe followed suit and agreed to participate.

Noticeably missing from the protesters of the Berlin Games was the White House. The President and Federal Government were uninvolved in discussions of whether or not to boycott, and did not have any stake in sending a team to Germany to represent the U.S because matters of participation in the Games were considered to be outside the government’s jurisdiction. Although the 1936 Olympics were arguably the most politically charged Games until the 1980 Moscow Games, subsequent Games also proved to be trying

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<sup>44</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Olympics*, 70.

for those who advocated for the separation of sports and politics, as politics could not be excluded from the arena.

The IOC was forced to confront the policies of South Africa, because South African policies posed a direct threat to the rules of the Olympic Charter. The South African National Olympic Committee (SANOC) was suspended from the IOC in 1964 for its refusal to take a stand against apartheid. The South African Interior Minister, Jan de Klerk, formally verbalized that the “government policy is that no mixed teams should take part in sports inside or outside the country.”<sup>45</sup> The IOC hoped that the SANOC would change its policies and form a multiracial team in time to participate in the 1968 Olympic Games. The IOC investigated conditions in South Africa in 1967, and once the IOC was convinced of SANOC’s devotion to sending a multiracial team to compete in the Games, SANOC’s membership in the IOC was reinstated.<sup>46</sup> Non-white South Africans were incredibly outraged by this reinstatement. Jean-Claude Ganga, representative of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (SCSA), objected “we do not wish that the Blacks of Africa appear like costumed apes presented at a fair and then, when the fair is over, sent back to their cages.”<sup>47</sup> He objected that the IOC would readmit SANOC for their adherence to the Olympic rules for the purpose of the Games, despite the continued oppression and racism at home. However, this was IOC policy- they would only involve politics when it directly violated the spirit of the games.

In response to SANOC’s reinstatement in the IOC, the thirty-two nation Organization of African Unity called for a boycott of the Games. The IOC reconsidered its decision, and

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<sup>45</sup> Guttman, *The Olympics*, 107.

<sup>46</sup> Goldblatt, *The Games*, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Olympics*, 126.

the committee voted to revoke the invitation sent to the SANOC.<sup>48</sup> The most prominent political display at the 1968 Olympics was when two black athletes, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, stood on the podium during the medal ceremony for their 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place victory in the 200-meter run, and raised their black-gloved fists in the “black power” salute, ignoring the anthem and the flags of the winning athletes.<sup>49</sup> Due to the unprecedented media coverage of the Games that had been increasing since 1960, the Olympic Games were well documented. However, the one image of the two athletes on the podium became one of the most viewed and revered images of the 1968 Games, stirring up black pride worldwide and protests against the racist policies.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the eagerness of the organizers of the 1972 Munich Olympic Games to hold a peaceful and apolitical Olympics to dispel all residual memories from the 1936 Berlin Games that had taken place under the Nazi regime, their hopes of Games free from politics were soon dashed with what became known as the Munich Massacre. Eleven Israeli Olympic athletes were taken hostage by Palestinians from the group Black September and were ultimately murdered.<sup>51</sup> The relatively new age of mass media surrounding the Games brought this event to millions of viewers watching the Olympic Games worldwide, and gave the Palestinians an audience of unprecedented scale to which they could address their grievances. The live broadcasting of the tragedy also allowed viewers to watch the memorial service, and spectators worldwide were united to mourn the tragic event. The 1968 and 1972 Olympics showcased the use of politics at the Games themselves;

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<sup>48</sup> D'Agati, *The Cold War and the 1984 Olympic Games*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> D'Agati, *The Cold War and the 1984 Olympic Games*, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Goldblatt, *The Games*, 240.

<sup>51</sup> Guttmann, *The Olympics*, 138. They demanded that Israel release 234 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel. There was debate about what to do about the games; should the games go on or should they be canceled? Ultimately Brundage decided the games must go on because “cancellation of the games would have been interpreted as a victory for the terrorists. Cancellation also would have encouraged repeated acts of terror.”

individuals took action at these Games to make a political statement without specific instruction from their government.

In the world of sports, much like in foreign affairs, less attention was paid to the non-Western countries. Although nations had previously boycotted the Olympic Games, no Western nation or superpower had boycotted the Games prior to 1980.<sup>52</sup> The United States had toyed with the idea of boycotting in 1936, but ultimately did not follow through. 1980 represented a shift in the politicization of the Olympic Games, demonstrated by the involvement of the Western nations and other superpowers. Since the 1980 boycott was proposed by the United States, the boycott movement was carried out on a larger scale than any other boycott had been in the past. The United States, a big superpower, used its place in the world to mount a strong opposition to the Moscow Olympics, gaining as much support from its own nation and other allied countries as possible. The next chapter looks more closely at the 1980 U.S-led Olympic boycott to discuss some of its distinctive qualities.

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<sup>52</sup> The 1976 Games in Montreal continued the streak of political involvement in the Olympic games with the boycott of twenty-nine African countries. New Zealand had competed against South Africa in a rugby match much to the anger of the SCSA, and in violation of the UN sporting embargo against competition with South Africa. The African nations wanted the IOC to ban New Zealand from the Olympic Games, but the IOC refused to do so.

## Chapter 2: The United States Government's Interference in the Olympic Movement

While the International Olympic Committee was the supreme authority over the Olympic movement, it required local bodies to enforce the ideals of the Olympic Games. According to the Olympic Charter established in 1908, National Organizing Committees (NOCs) were to be established to “develop, promote, and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries, in accordance with the Olympic Charter.”<sup>53</sup> The charter laid out the specific roles of the NOCs and their responsibilities in preserving the integrity of the Olympic movement. To ensure the exclusion of political influence, the charter recognized that the NOCs have the “exclusive authority for the representation of their respective countries at the Olympic Games,” and most important to the discussion of the 1980 Olympic boycott, “the NOCs must preserve their autonomy and resist all pressures of any kind, including but not limited to *political*, legal, religious, or economic pressures which may prevent them from complying with the Olympic Charter.”<sup>54 55</sup> Prior to the 1980 Summer Games, the United States Olympic Committee had maintained autonomy regarding U.S. participation in the Olympic Games. This chapter will show how President Carter overstepped his role as President to interfere with the proceedings of the 1980 Summer Games, and how, as a result, the Olympic boycott politicized the Games in an unprecedented manner.

In 1936, the only other time a U.S. boycott of the Olympics seemed likely, the debates over whether or not to boycott the Berlin Games took place between the different

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<sup>53</sup> “Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition” (Comite International Olympique, 1980), <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1980-Olympic-Charter-Provisional.pdf>, Article 24.

<sup>54</sup> “Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition,” Article 24.

<sup>55</sup> “Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition,” Article 24.

athletic organizations under the auspices of the USOC. Thus, 1980 presented a vastly different landscape; the decision to stage an American boycott of the Moscow Games was initiated by the President of the United States, and carried out and debated in Congress, specifically in the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

To better understand the boycott of the Moscow Games, it is important to discuss the Soviet position on sports and the Olympics. The Soviet Union initially viewed sports as a bourgeois enterprise that interfered with the workers involvement in class struggle. However, with the end of WWII, the commencement of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe, and the onset of the Cold War, the Soviets decided to enter the international sporting world in an attempt to spread communism through sports.<sup>56</sup> The Soviet Olympic Committee was accepted into the IOC in 1951, and the Soviet Union competed in its first Olympic Games in 1952. The entrance of the Soviet Union into the IOC and the Olympic movement added a new dimension to East-West relations.

The Cold War, following the end of WWII, played a large role in international foreign relations and multinational events. International sports suffered the most from these contentious relations; athletic competition served as substitute for actual warfare. Although the sports did not actually play a role in the politics of the Cold War, sports were used as a propaganda tool for the war.<sup>57</sup> The Olympic sports were used to test the vitality of each nation's political system. Andrei Zdanov, a Soviet ideologue, explained that a victory in sport was "a victory for the Soviet form of society."<sup>58</sup> Acting Secretary of State Warren Christopher explained, "the Soviet Union has made clear that it intends the Games to serve

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 26.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *The Politics and Culture*, 117.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *The Politics and Culture*, 117.

important national political ends. For the U.S.S.R., international sports competition is an instrument of government policy and a means to advance foreign policy goals.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, sport became the arena in which the Soviets and the Western countries each sought to defeat their ideological opponent.

Hosting the Olympic Games was endowed with political importance, so it was not surprising that the Soviet Union vied for the opportunity to host the Olympic Games, since their intention in joining the Olympic movement had been to promote the communist political system. Historically, the host city used this occasion to show the world the glory and grandeur of their country by building up their city for the greatest of modern day exhibitions. The selection of host cities had previously been rife with political overtones, specifically with the selection of Berlin for the 1936 Games. Hitler used the Games as propaganda to show the world the greatness of the new Nazi regime. Germany also invested many resources into the Olympic village, stadiums, media coverage, and press exposure to make the Olympics superior to the previous Games.

The IOC selection of Moscow as the host for the 1980 Summer Olympics was a politically motivated decision as well, that was arrived at during the 1974 74<sup>th</sup> IOC Congress Session in Vienna. Moscow and Los Angeles were the two bidding cities, the first of many showdowns between the U.S. and the Soviet Union on an Olympic platform. The Soviet Union emerged victorious, and Moscow was awarded the role of host of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games, while Lake Placid in the United States was chosen as the host for the 1980 Winter Games. After selecting Moscow to host the Summer Games, Lord Killanin, the president of the IOC, stated, “today, thanks to the Olympic movement, countries which

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<sup>59</sup> “DeFrantz v. United States Olympic Com., 492 F. Supp. 1181 (D.D.C. 1980),” *Justia Law*, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/492/1181/2308718/>.

have very different political, religious, and social views are able to come together in peace to compete in sport.”<sup>60</sup> The selection of Moscow as a host city was particularly significant, because it marked the first time that the IOC conferred the honor of hosting the Olympic Games on a communist country. This was a crucial step that the IOC took to bring the Eastern-bloc countries into the Olympic movement in order to make it a truly worldwide phenomenon.

Although the United States was bitter about losing the bid to host the Summer Olympics, other nations responded with elation to Moscow’s selection. The French delegate to the IOC explained, “everybody is happy that the games should go to Moscow.”<sup>61</sup> *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, reported, “in terms of athletic achievement the honor is long overdue.”<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Promyslov, chairman of the Moscow city Soviet’s executive committee, ardently believed that the Soviet prestige in sports made it a suitable host for the 1980 Games. He asserted that Soviet sportsmen competed with athletes all over the world “expressing their aspiration not only for good results, but for contacts and friendship with young people of the world,” aligning the Soviet sports ideals with those of the Olympic movement.<sup>63</sup> Although there was some concern about the political implications of the Games being held in Moscow, Sergei Pavlov, the Soviet Minister of Sports and Education and the president of the USSR National Olympic Committee, reiterated, “there are no obstacles- political, economical, or technological- to staging the Olympic Games in

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<sup>60</sup> Roger I. Abrams, *Playing Tough The World of Sports and Politics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2013), 150.

<sup>61</sup> Fred Tupper, “Moscow, Lake Placid Awarded ’80 Olympics,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1974.

<sup>62</sup> “The Game Goes Moscow’s Way,” *The Guardian*, October 24, 1974.

<sup>63</sup> “Games of the XXII Olympiad Moscow 1980” (Moscow: Organising Committee of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, 1980), <http://library.la84.org/6oic/OfficialReports/1980/or1980v1.pdf>, 13.



Moscow.”<sup>64</sup> He went on to emphasize that hosting the Olympic Games “would symbolize for the Soviet people a practical implementation of the Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence of states with different social and political systems,” which, ironically, was one of the purposes of the Olympic Games laid out by Coubertin in founding the modern Olympic movement.<sup>65</sup> Although the Western nations of the world did not agree with the politics of the Soviet Union, none of the nations were vehemently opposed to the Olympic Games being held there. Carter was the sole instigator of the boycott movement and attempted to use his influence to persuade American allies and Western nations to join his boycott.

Carter utilized his position as President of the United States to insert himself into the discussion of the Summer Olympics with the USOC, despite the separation that was supposed to be maintained between these two governing bodies. The first action President Carter took in deciding to boycott the Moscow Games was writing a letter to Robert Kane, the president of the USOC. In this letter Carter outright admitted to injecting politics into a sphere in which it had no place. Ideally, Carter believed in the “desirability of keeping government policy out of the Olympics”, but he noted, “deeper issues are at stake.”<sup>66</sup> Carter recommended that the USOC urge the IOC to move the Olympic Games from Moscow. If their plea was rejected, Carter suggested setting up alternative Games, to which “the United States Government is prepared to lend its full support.”<sup>67</sup> That this full support referred to the government’s willingness to lend *monetary* support to the alternate Games was

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<sup>64</sup> Larry Eldridge, “Moscow 1980 Olympics Poses Questions: University Games Marred,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 8, 1974.

<sup>65</sup> Eldridge, “Moscow 1980 Olympics Poses Questions.”

<sup>66</sup> Jimmy Carter, “1980 Summer Olympics Letter to the President of the U.S. Olympic Committee on the Games to Be Held in Moscow,” January 20, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33059>.

<sup>67</sup> Carter, “1980 Summer Olympics Letter.”

clarified in the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.<sup>68</sup> The United States government had previously remained steadfast against monetary support for Olympic athletes and teams, and Carter's eagerness to lend support to these Games to have them moved if necessary represented a drastic shift in the relationship between the United States government and the USOC.

Carter repeatedly used the threat of money to force the USOC to back his decision to boycott the Summer Olympic Games. The Carter administration indicated "it may seek to revoke the tax-exempt status of the U.S. Olympic Committee unless the committee votes to boycott the Moscow Olympics this summer."<sup>69</sup> Don Miller, Executive Director of the USOC, indicated that among the proposed actions by the government was "revising the committee's congressional charter to give the government a voice in its operations, and halting a proposed \$4.2 million appropriation for the committee that is before congress."<sup>70</sup> By threatening to revoke the USOC's tax-exempt status and take away a large source of money for the USOC, the government bullied the USOC into submitting to the President's demands.

To impose pressure on the USOC and convince them to support his decision to boycott the Moscow Games, Carter made it seem like the USOC was standing alone in opposition to the decision to boycott. In his letter to Robert Kane, Carter requested that the USOC act "in cooperation with other National Olympic Committees," indicating that all of

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<sup>68</sup> "Resolutions Calling for the Relocation, Cancellation or Boycotting of the 1980 Summer Olympics" (1980), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000014783845;view=1up;seq=5>. There is a specific mention of providing the monetary funds to support the alternate Games.

<sup>69</sup> Helen Dewar and Nancy Scannell, "White House Looks at USOC's Tax Status," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147281516/A5E9D192317B4BA4PQ/3?accountid=10226>.

<sup>70</sup> Dewar and Scannell, "White House Looks at USOC's Tax Status."

the other Olympic entities were in agreement and the USOC was the sole opponent.<sup>71</sup> In his State of the Union address, Carter informed the public that he had “notified the Olympic Committee that with Soviet invading forces in Afghanistan, neither the American people nor I will support sending an Olympic team to Moscow.”<sup>72</sup> There was an implicit threat in notifying the USOC that the President would not support them sending a team. Furthermore, his “notification” to the USOC took away their autonomy to decide on the issue of boycott for themselves, and applied pressure on them to comply with the President’s call for boycott.

The debate of whether or not to boycott the Olympics was initiated by the president, discussed in the government, and only then was the discussion continued in the USOC. The House overwhelmingly adopted resolution 249, which supported Carter’s request for the USOC to appeal to the IOC to transfer, cancel, or postpone the 1980 Games scheduled to take place in Moscow. Boycotting the Olympic Games was not under the auspices of the United States government, and therefore no support for the President’s action, or the discussion of a potential boycott and alternate Games should have even been a discussion in the United States Senate.

Once the President intervened with the Olympic proceedings, he could have kept the discussion between his government and members of the USOC private until a final decision was reached at which point the public would be notified. However, Carter utilized the media to stir up the emotions of millions of Americans, both spectators and potential Olympic athletes alike. On the same day that Carter wrote to Robert Kane, January 20,

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<sup>71</sup> Carter, “1980 Summer Olympics Letter.”

<sup>72</sup> Jimmy Carter, *January 23, 1980: State of the Union Address* (Washington D.C., 1980), National Archives, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-23-1980-state-union-address>.

1980, he appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" which was broadcasted live on television and radio to millions of viewers and listeners. Carter informed the viewers that unless the Soviets withdrew their troops from Afghanistan, he would not support U.S. participation in the Olympic Games. He also notified the listeners that he had sent a letter to the USOC urging them to comply with his position.<sup>73</sup> Carter reiterated his position regarding the Summer Games during his State of the Union Address on January 23, 1980, another extremely public speech broadcasted throughout America. Since the discussion of the boycott was publicized from the moment of its inception, the media continued to report on the latest developments of the boycott leading up to the commencement of the Summer Games, keeping the nation's emotions high and the debate alive.

As a result of the attention given to the boycott in the media, the American people were inevitably brought into the discussion of boycott. During a USOC meeting on January 25, 1980, Kane called attention to the unorthodox way the president went about the boycott. Kane expressed that he felt the "USOC had been betrayed because the USOC was not brought into the discussion until after the country had been whipped up emotionally."<sup>74</sup> Prominent athletes like Anita Defrantz, a member of the 1976 women's rowing team, questioned the President's actions by declaring that

our president doesn't know anything about the Olympic Games. Not only that, doesn't he know that we are hosting the Olympic Games next month?...He needs to be informed how this works. And, the Olympic Winter Games will be in Lake Placid very shortly, and not only that, the 1984 Olympic Games will be in Los Angeles.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Jimmy Carter, Meet the Press, Television, January 20, 1980, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=33060>.

<sup>74</sup> "Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee," January 25, 1980, USOC Archive.

<sup>75</sup> Anita L. Defrantz, An Olympian's Oral History, May 13, 2001, <http://library.la84.org/6oic/OralHistory/OHDeFrantz.pdf>.

It was evident to the participants of the sporting world that proper procedures were not being followed, and Carter had taken action in an unprecedented manner. Defrantz also pointed out that Carter had not properly thought about the consequences an American boycott would have on the Games that America was set to host that Winter, and in the Summer of 1984.

In speaking before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Robert Kane specifically addressed President Carter's statement about the other National Olympic Committees' cooperation with the boycott. Kane informed the Senate committee "up to now we don't have that cooperation from the other Olympic committees of the world."<sup>76</sup> Through Kane's communication with other National Olympic Committees it was evident that they had no intention of boycotting, and Kane brought telegrams from these countries directly testifying to that fact. Kane believed that without other nations' support, the U.S. "would have a problem to face if we are out there alone swaying in the wind."<sup>77</sup> The boycott was not properly justified, and if the U.S. were the only country to boycott, it would harm the U.S.'s reputation more than it would impact the Soviets.

The transcript of the House hearing during which Robert Kane testified reads like a cross-examination; members of the committee asked provocative and aggressive questions to try to shake and startle Kane. It was not an open discussion of facts or consequences, but seemed more like an intimidation tactic to rattle Kane and induce him to do everything in his power to ensure that the USOC complied with the boycott of the Moscow Games.

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<sup>76</sup> Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, "U.S Participation in the 1980 Summer Olympic Games, January 23, 1980, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Committee on Foreign Affairs, "U.S Participation", 6.

Throughout Carter's discussion about the boycott, there was a strong emphasis on the actions of other countries. In previous Olympic boycotts, the nation boycotting made a statement by choosing not to participate in the Games, but did not campaign other nations to follow suit. Regarding the 1980 Summer Olympic Games, Carter was not only insistent that the United States boycott the Games, but was equally as insistent that all of the countries aligned with the U.S. boycott the Games as well. Carter sent cables to all of the U.S. allies to urge them to stand in solidarity with the U.S. and boycott the Summer Games. In his telegram to the presidents and prime ministers of various U.S. allies, Carter stated his belief that

we must show unity in opposing aggression anywhere. We cannot afford to allow the Soviet Union and others to miscalculate the strength of our common purpose. The boycott of the Olympics is a concrete measure by which we can demonstrate to the leaders in the Soviet Union that democratic societies will stand together for what is right.<sup>78</sup>

Although previously Carter indicated that his opposition was based on Soviet aggression and not their policies, the fact that in reaching out to other nations he emphasized that the democratic societies needed to stick together, presented the boycott as a struggle between democracy and communism. The U.S. needed support from other countries to make the boycott an effective measure.

Not all countries were easily convinced, or felt as strongly as the United States did about boycotting the Moscow Games. Carter appealed to the countries as "a friend of the United States."<sup>79</sup> Some of the smaller countries may have felt an implicit pressure from the

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<sup>78</sup> "Memo to President Rodrigo Carazo Odio of Costa Rica, President Luis Herrera Campins of Venezuela, and Prime Minister of the Bahamas Lynden O. Pindling Regarding Their Participation in the Olympic Games in Moscow. The U.S. Wants to See a Boycott of the Games due to Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan" (United States), U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4ZMLY7>.

<sup>79</sup> Memo to President Rodrigo. Overall, 62 nations joined Carter's boycott of the Games.

U.S. that if they did not employ an Olympic boycott, the U.S. would cut ties with or punish them. In *Olympic Review* Lord Killanin, President of the IOC, confirmed that “in the press, presidents of National Olympic Committees are reported as not wishing to boycott the Games in Moscow. Further, all National Olympic Committees...have stressed that the Games should not be used for political purposes by any of the parties concerned.”<sup>80</sup> The nations that refused to participate in the boycott did so because they believed that the Olympic movement was not dependent on the host city’s policies. The President of Finland responded to Carter’s letter requesting them to join the U.S-led boycott saying:

In Finland, the question of participation in the Olympic Games has been discussed as a matter of principle by the Finnish National Olympic Committee in 1978. It was decided then to support the view that all countries represented in the International Olympic Committee should abstain from boycotts or other politically motivated actions with regard to the Olympic Games. In accordance with this position, the Finnish National Olympic Committee continues to support the holding of the 1980 summer Olympic Games in Moscow as planned...as far as the situation in Afghanistan is concerned, the position of the Government of Finland has recently been expressed in the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>81</sup>

This response showed that the Government of Finland understood how the Olympic committees were meant to operate, and that Olympic decisions were to be separate from government decisions. The President of Finland acknowledged his disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but believed that his condemnation of the action in the United Nations was enough to show the Soviets that they did not have world support. Finland, along with many of the other nations who rejected Carter’s plea to boycott the Summer Games, believed that Olympic decisions were decided among the National Olympic

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<sup>80</sup> Lord Killanin, “No to the Boycott,” *Olympic Review*, February 1980, <http://library.la84.org/OlympicInformationCenter/OlympicReview/1980/ore147/ORE147u.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Urho Kekkonen, “The Government of Finland Declines to Join the U.S. in Boycotting the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow. The U.S. Boycott Is in Response to the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan” (Helsinki, January 22, 1980), U.S. Declassified Documents Online, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4ZU323>.

Committees, and the government had no role in deciding whether or not to send an Olympic team.

The powerful role that National Olympic Committees played in being the sole-deciders of whether or not to send an Olympic team was most evident in Britain and France. In Both Britain and France, the governments strongly supported an Olympic boycott and were in communication with Carter expressing their support. However, both of these countries' Olympic Committees voted to send a team to compete in the Moscow Olympics. Despite the government's disapproval, the government did not pressure the Olympic Committee to change their decision, nor did they threaten the athletes who competed in the Games. However, because the athletes from Britain and France lacked support from their governments, they competed at the 1980 Games under the Olympic flag instead of their national flags.<sup>82</sup> The case of Britain and France provided a stark contrast to the case in the U.S. with Carter, who pressured the USOC to vote not to send an Olympic team, and individually threatened athletes to prevent them from participating in the Games.

### *The 1980 Winter Games*

While the questions of what to do with regard to the Summer Olympic Games were still unanswered, the 1980 Winter Games were fast approaching, and countries waited with baited breath to see the effect the discussion of boycott would have on the Winter Games. During the same 1974 IOC conference that Moscow was awarded the 1980 Summer Games, Lake Placid was awarded the 1980 Winter Games. Despite the prospect of the United States

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 193.



boycotting the Games in Moscow that summer, the Soviet Union did not hesitate to send their own athletic teams to compete in the United States for the Winter Olympics. Upon arrival in the U.S. the Soviet official proclaimed, “we don’t want to boycott anyone, and we don’t want to destroy the Olympic movement,” implying that a boycott of the Games and the destruction of the Olympic ideals were synonymous.<sup>83</sup>

The biggest showdown between the Soviet Union and the U.S. at the Games came in the form of an ice hockey match, which had implicit political significance. The Soviets had an incredible team, making them the favored team to win, while the chances of the American team emerging with a gold medal “would require an even greater miracle.”<sup>84</sup> Although the tension between the Soviet Union and the U.S. was already palpable in the Olympic Games, Carter’s call for a boycott of the Moscow Games “added further political overtones, not that they are ever needed when East meets West in sports.”<sup>85</sup> Leading up to the match, Jim Craig, the goalie for the U.S. team, expressed “I hate them. I don’t hate their hockey players specifically, but I hate what they stand for.”<sup>86</sup> It was evident that this was not just a sporting event, but had deep ideological and political implications; it was a confrontation between communism and democracy.

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<sup>83</sup> Barbara Basler, “Soviet Athletes Arrive for Olympics Denouncing U.S. Call for a Boycott,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/121137920?accountid=10226>.

<sup>84</sup> Dave Anderson, “Sports of the Times: America’s Team Plays Its Game on Ice,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/121169897?accountid=10226>.

<sup>85</sup> Ted Green, “Americans Put Soviets on Ice, 4-3 U.S. Can Take the Gold by Beating Finland Sunday,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/162759965?accountid=10226>.

<sup>86</sup> Donald E. Abelson, “Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 63–94, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/crv.0.0057>.

The U.S. ice hockey triumphed over the defending hockey champions, the Soviet Union, by a score of 4-3. The team erupted in song and chant of “God Bless America” all the way back to their locker room. Their victory resulted in a congratulatory phone call from President Carter himself.<sup>87</sup> While it was customary for the President to offer congratulations to the athletes who competed in the Olympic Games, usually he held a ceremony after the Games were complete to celebrate all of the victories and achievements of the athletes who represented and competed for the U.S. The U.S. victory over the Soviets did not even secure the U.S. a gold medal for ice hockey; there were still more games to be played and won. Yet, the President specifically made an effort to congratulate the team after their victory against the Soviet team. The over exaggerated reaction to defeating the Soviets demonstrated how important the U.S. believed that match was, and how it represented an ideological victory of the free world over communism.

The media played a critical role in fueling the political significance of the hockey match between the two superpowers. The *Chicago Tribune* described the game as being “quite literally a cold war, this Olympic hockey contest between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the good guys finally won.”<sup>88</sup> After the United States had won its final victory to win the gold medal, the head coach of the ice hockey team, Herb Brooks, received his second phone call in two days from President Carter. Upon reflection and further conversation about the team’s victory over the Soviets, Brooks reiterated “it was a great win for everybody in sport and the American people in general. From the things we had to

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<sup>87</sup> Gerald Eskenazi, “U.S. Defeats Soviet Squad in Olympic Hockey by 4-3,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/121379344?accountid=10226>.

<sup>88</sup> David Israel, “Good Guys Triumph in the Ultimate Showdown,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 23, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/170158212?accountid=10226>.

overcome, to different beliefs, ways of life. It just proves our life is the proper way to continue.”<sup>89</sup> The media helped to elevate the ice hockey match from a sports competition to a political and ideological competition, in which victory championed the victor’s ideology.

Carter was quick to capitalize on the hockey team’s success to benefit his election campaign. He referred to the hockey victory as one of the proudest moments he ever experienced as President of the United States. *The Sun* reported that the U.S. victory over the Soviet Union “encourages national unity at a time of foreign crisis, and the political effect is to impel people to support the president.”<sup>90</sup> However, the national unity that was established after the U.S. victory did just the opposite in terms of support for the President. The broadcasting of the Olympic Games allowed millions of viewers across the U.S. to watch the U.S. emerge victorious over the Soviets in a close ice hockey match. The victory led to nation-wide support for the athletes and the Olympic Games as an arena in which to triumph over the Soviets. The ice hockey victory shifted the nations’ view on the boycott; Charles Piemonte of *Newsday* explained the new popular opinion that “a boycott removes other opportunities for us to earn the currency that is respected the world over-Olympic gold. At a time when we must stand firm against the Russians, an avoidance strategy seems inappropriate.”<sup>91</sup> Despite the sense of pride and accomplishment that the nation felt about the ice hockey victory and the athletes, President Carter remained steadfast in his intention to boycott the Summer Games. After the success of the U.S. teams in the Winter Games,

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<sup>89</sup>Donald E. Abelson, “Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* (2010),40(1):63  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/377465/pdf>. Accessed on February 1, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Fred Barnes, “Hockey Win Viewed as Boost for Carter.” *The Sun (1837-1991)*, Feb 25 1980, 1.  
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/538227342?accountid=10226>. Accessed February 1, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Piemonte, “Hockey Heroes Are Our Best Diplomats,” *Newsday*, February 29, 1980,  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/965025183/9BEF58B9BEFD4695PQ/45?accountid=10226>.

Carter had even more work to do in convincing the USOC, the athletes, and the American people that a boycott of the Olympic Games was politically necessary.

Although previous Olympic Games had covert and blatant displays of politics, both leading up to the Games and at the Games themselves, the 1980 Summer Olympic boycott brought politics into the Games in an unprecedented manner. No U.S. President had been as involved in the Olympic Committee proceedings as Carter was, nor had any other President influenced the USOC's decisions and voting the way Carter had. Boycotts in previous Olympic Games had been limited to a few nations, while 1980 was the largest scale boycott of the modern Olympic Games. Not only did Carter violate the Olympic Charter to pressure the U.S. Olympic Committee, but he also sent letters to every U.S. ally to pressure them to do the same. Given the U.S. position in world affairs, it is impossible to overlook that some smaller countries who depended on the United States felt pressured to comply with the boycott to show their allegiance with and support of the United States. The modern Olympic movement had survived wars and foreign aggression without mass interruption or intervention from a large number of countries, but the summer of 1980 represented an insertion of politics in an unparalleled way.

### Chapter 3: Using the Olympic Boycott to Protect Human Rights

The United States had resisted asserting its political influence on the USOC and the Olympic movement for the entirety of the modern Olympic Games. Even in the politically charged 1936 Olympic Games, the U.S. federal government stayed out of the USOC decision making process of whether or not to send athletic teams to represent the United States. It was clear that the 1980 Summer Olympics followed a very different trajectory, and there was a blatant insertion of politics into the Olympic movement, in an unprecedented manner and magnitude than ever before. This chapter explores why Carter deviated from the past Presidents' exclusion from the Olympic movement, and why Carter believed an Olympic boycott was his only option, and an action that he felt compelled to take.

The single event that threatened the 1980 Summer Games was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on December 27, 1979. The Soviet involvement grew steadily after a Marxist coup overthrew the republican government of Afghanistan in April of 1978. Resistance movements against the pro-Soviet government led the Soviets to expand their military presence and strengthen their political influence in Afghanistan. The Soviets' invasion in December resulted in the murder of the reigning Prime Minister and the instillation of a new Soviet chosen leader.<sup>92</sup> As a result, the Afghani government lost much of its autonomy, and Soviet political influence pervaded Afghani policy. There continued to be a large Soviet military presence, along with a strong Soviet security and police presence under control of the KGB. It became overwhelmingly evident that Moscow intended a prolonged occupation, and was determined to completely wipe out

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<sup>92</sup> United States Department of State, "Our Assessment of Recent Events in Afghanistan," December 28, 1979, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679075593?accountid=10226>.

any resistance movement that was present in Afghanistan. Order was maintained throughout the country by the use of terror, which was reinforced by many executions; the Soviets had resorted to brutal tactics to force the Afghan people into submission.<sup>93</sup>

Despite this event taking place on the other side of the world, Carter saw the necessity of U.S. involvement in this foreign affair. The need for U.S. intervention was multifaceted. First, Carter believed that the freedom of the people of Afghanistan was at risk. Second, the U.S. had economic interests at stake, due to its dependency on the region for oil exports, which the U.S. government believed would be threatened by the presence of the Soviets. Peace and stability were believed to be critical for the survival of nations in the region, and the U.S. wanted to support Afghan independence to convey to the Soviets their view that the Soviet intervention was despicable.<sup>94</sup> President Carter needed to take firm action and decided, “most of the cultural and economic exchanges currently under consideration will be deferred. Trade with the Soviet Union will be severely restricted.”<sup>95</sup> Ending an economic relationship followed a more clearly defined course of action established by the President and government, but there was no precedent for what cultural exchanges were, and what curtailing cultural exchanges with another country actually involved. However, in a year where the biggest international cultural event was to take place, it seemed that the President decided to use the Olympics as a vehicle to hinder the

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<sup>93</sup> “Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,” Special Report (Washington D.C.: United States Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, April 1, 1980), <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679056024?accountid=10226>.

<sup>94</sup> “Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.”

<sup>95</sup> Jimmy Carter, *January 4, 1980: Speech on Afghanistan* (Washington D.C., 1980), National Archives, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-4-1980-speech-afghanistan>.

Soviet Unions' economic growth, hurt their pride, and halt cultural interaction with the Soviet Union.

In being so firm about isolating the Soviet Union economically and culturally, it was interesting to observe what happened in the 1980 Winter Olympic Games held in Lake Placid in the United States. President Carter delivered his speech condemning the Soviet Union in January, prior to the Winter Olympic Games. The Games were hosted by the United States, and yet there was no question about the attendance of the Soviet Union at these Games. State representative Paul Gionfriddo shared this sentiment of confusion and argued, "if the U.S. is to use the Olympics, then we ought to be talking about the Winter Olympics."<sup>96</sup> If the U.S. was serious about using the Olympics as a diplomatic tool to protest against the aggression of the Soviet Union, then instead of boycotting Games that were months away, the President had the opportunity to take a stand right then and ban Soviet teams from entering the U.S. and competing in the Winter Olympics.

However, the possibility of barring the Soviets from the Winter Games was not so feasible. There were specific instructions for the host city that

all NOCs recognized by the IOC are entitled to send participants to the Olympic Games to which they shall be admitted without discrimination on grounds of religion, race or political affiliation...such persons shall be allowed to enter the host country simply on presentation of the Olympic document.<sup>97</sup>

As a host city, the United States had to adhere to the rules of the IOC, and was forbidden from banning countries from participating in the Olympic Games. If the U.S. violated the

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<sup>96</sup> Jon Lender, "Legislator Urges Winter Games Ban," *The Hartford Courant*, January 16, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/545913650?accountid=10226>.

<sup>97</sup> "Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition" (Comite International Olympique, 1980), <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1980-Olympic-Charter-Provisional.pdf>.

terms of the Olympic Charter, the IOC had grounds to remove the Games from the host city. If the United States attempted to hold the Games anyway, it would not be considered the Olympic Games because of the clear violation of the rules, and the United States would not be allowed to use any of the Olympic symbols or perform any of the Olympic rituals. This would have been more detrimental to the American nation than to the Soviets, both in terms of economics and pride, and thus Carter did not view banning the Soviets from the Winter Games as a viable form of action to take against the Soviet Union.

Therefore, Carter looked ahead to the Summer Games, where he saw an opportunity to make a statement of condemnation of Soviet policy. The proximity of the invasion of Afghanistan to the Olympic Games which were to be held in Moscow, fueled the flames of the Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, and led to a tumultuous year for the American people and the government. Carter addressed the American people regarding Afghanistan in January of 1980, prior to his State of the Union address. He called the infiltration of Soviet troops into Afghanistan a “callous violation of international law and the United Nations charter.”<sup>98</sup> On January 14, 1980, the United Nations General Assembly, in which the Soviet Union could not exercise its veto power, condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>99</sup> Although U.S.-Soviet relations were less tense than they had previously been at the height of the Cold War, and it seemed like the end of the Cold War was in sight, the U.S. government firmly insisted, “Détente, however, must be a two-way street. The Soviet invasion has increased tensions and precluded business as usual with USSR.”<sup>100</sup> The Soviet action had destroyed any chance of imminent

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<sup>98</sup> Jimmy Carter, *January 4, 1980: Speech on Afghanistan*.

<sup>99</sup> “Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.”

<sup>100</sup> “Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.”



peace with the United States, and forced President Carter to feel compelled to take action against the Soviet Union to convey this message.

The call for a boycott was seen as hypocritical among members of the international sporting world. Western governments had participated in similar foreign affair operations, but did not receive the same criticism as the Soviets. The Great Britain government supported the boycott yet had also been guilty of invading Afghanistan in the past, and had maintained a continued presence in Ireland against their will, similar to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>101</sup> Even after Carter called for an Olympic boycott, there were still sports exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union; U.S. boxing and wrestling teams had traveled to the Soviet Union to compete, deepening the accusations of hypocrisy against the U.S.<sup>102</sup> It was contradictory for Carter to allow athletic teams to compete in the Soviet Union prior to the Olympic Games, while the Soviet Union was still present in Afghanistan. The IOC also reminded the U.S. of their involvement in the Vietnam War when they were hosting the Winter Olympics, and their involvement in Cambodia in 1974 during which the 1980 Winter Games were awarded to them.<sup>103</sup> The United States' own involvement in military aggression while hosting the Olympics was inconsistent with the United States decision to boycott the Games as a result of the Soviet presence in

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<sup>101</sup> Kenny Moore, "The Decision: No Go on Moscow," *Sports Illustrated*, April 21, 1980, <http://www.si.com/vault/1980/04/21/824583/the-decision-no-go-on-moscow-with-the-full-weight-of-the-presidency-pledged-to-an-american-boycott-of-the-1980-summer-games-the-us-olympic-committee--distraught-dismayed-but-dutiful--has-acceded-to-the-inevitable>.

<sup>102</sup> Jay Weiner, "The View From Moscow: Spirit of Games Thrives Despite Threat of Boycott," *Newsday*, March 16, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1014009233?accountid=10226>.

<sup>103</sup> Kenneth Reich, "U.S Expects Rejection of Stand on Moscow Olympics," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/162732071?accountid=10226>.

Afghanistan. Therefore, there had to have been a different motive driving the call for boycott than merely the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.

The United States was not the only nation to criticize the Soviet invasion. After announcing the possibility of a boycott, Carter wrote a letter to Robert Kane, the president of the USOC, urging Kane and the committee to support his initiative for a boycott against the Moscow Games. In Carter's letter, he discussed the threat the Soviet Union posed on National security and the security of other independent nations. He explained, "that is why I have taken severe economic measures announced on January 4, and why other free nations are supporting these measures. That is why the United Nations General Assembly, by an overwhelming vote of 104 to 18, condemned the invasion and urged the prompt withdrawal of Soviet troops."<sup>104</sup> It was clear from the resolution passed in the General Assembly of the United Nations that the Soviet's actions were universally condemned, and not just deplored by the United States. Many nations were taking economic action against the Soviets in the form of halting trade and imposing sanctions to convey their disapproval of the Soviet's actions in the hope of a Soviet withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. However, no other nation proposed boycotting the Olympic Games in Moscow, or was as insistent upon it as the United States was in using the Games as a form of punishment against the Soviets.

This is indicative of other motives and factors that influenced Carter's decision to boycott the Olympic Games-the most significant being as a resolution of the Iran hostage crisis. On November 4, 1979, demonstrators stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took 65 official American personnel hostage. The President was involved in trying to

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<sup>104</sup> Jimmy Carter, "1980 Summer Olympics Letter to the President of the U.S. Olympic Committee on the Games to Be Held in Moscow," January 20, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33059>.

negotiate the safe release of the American hostages, which was vital to maintaining diplomatic relations among nations, and to the conduct of American foreign policy. Thus, Carter was involved with trying to navigate the Iranian crisis while dealing with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>105</sup>

In the House and Senate hearings, various letters from members of the IOC and other National Olympic Committees were submitted as testimony to America's political stake in the Olympic boycott. A Canadian representative to the IOC and president of the Canadian Olympic Committee, Richard Pound, wrote a letter to Lord Killanin, president of the IOC, to update him on the political climate in the United States surrounding the boycott issue:

At the moment they are in the process of maneuvering themselves from a position of being clearly right (and adding to their series of steady if unspectacular political victories) on the whole question of Iran and Afghanistan, into being cast in the role of the "heavy" or "bad guy" in relations to the entire Olympic Movement. I think this may well be due to a failure to consider the implications of what a boycott may mean. I realize that because of the media exposure generally in the U.S., (which, as it relates to their government, is exacerbated by the fact that 1980 is an election year) there will always be more coverage and more temptation for politicians to adopt positions on the spur of the moment than we could hope.<sup>106</sup>

Pound made a number of compelling points in his discussion about the boycott of the Moscow Games. He admitted that the Soviets were wrong in their actions against Afghanistan, which most of the Western nations condemned. Arguably, Pound fully supported the economic sanctions being implemented against the Soviet Union by the

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<sup>105</sup> Warren Christopher, "Declaration of Warren Christopher" (Washington D.C.: Department of State, November 30, 1979), DNSA collection: Iran Revolution, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1679060907/F3787AD3BC2C4639PQ/2?accountid=10226>.

<sup>106</sup> Committee on Foreign Relations United State Senate, "1980 Summer Olympics Boycott," January 28, 1980, 6.

United States and other Western Nations on account of their aggression against Afghanistan. However, bringing the Olympic Games into the discussion is where the United States broke away from being validated by other nations. Pound believed that the decision to boycott was politically motivated beyond the symbolism of the Olympic Games. In his letter, Pound highlighted the fact that it was an election year, suggesting that this had significant consequences for Carter's actions and cannot be ignored.

To fully understand why Carter was so dedicated to boycotting the Moscow Games, it is important to discuss Carter's presidency and what his political campaign and policies were. When Jimmy Carter became president and entered the White House in 1977, he was an unlikely choice for the President. Although he did not know much about foreign affairs, he did not allow a more experienced individual to oversee foreign policy, but intended instead to personally direct the administration's foreign policy. With regard to the Soviet Union, Carter adopted his advisor Brzezinski's approach, that to deal with the Third World unrest the United States needed to respond forcefully to Soviet intervention in developing nations.<sup>107</sup>

Carter identified more with moralistic idealism than with realpolitik that had been practiced by Nixon and Kissinger. Carter believed that the use of realpolitik had sacrificed moral standards by employing unsavory tactics such as secret diplomacy and covert support for repressive right-wing dictatorships. Carter wanted to rebuild American ideals, and thus made human rights a focal point of his administration's foreign policy.<sup>108</sup> It was with this tenacious dedication to defend human rights worldwide that the détente ultimately broke down, and it was the same promotion of human rights that led Jimmy

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<sup>107</sup> Ronald E. Powaski, *The Cold War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>108</sup> Powaski, *The Cold War*.

Carter to declare a United States boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. Running on a campaign platform of protecting human rights, it was essential for Carter to make big political moves to show his devotion to his campaign promises, especially during an election year. Boycotting the Moscow Games to protect human rights abroad was a big enough move to show the United States he was committed to upholding universal human rights at all costs.

Carter's use of the Olympic boycott as a political and punitive tool was implemented in this case to directly respond to the Iran hostage crisis, and make up for his inability to safely retrieve the American hostages. The sequence of topics discussed in Carter's speech given in early January of 1980 revealed his underlying intentions and motivations for the boycott of the Moscow Games. His speech opened with a discussion about the Iran hostage crisis, and his dedication to protecting national safety and hostage safety. Immediately after this introduction, Carter moved to discussing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The main purpose of Carter's call for the speech was to address the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the economic sanctions that would be imposed as a result. In this address, Carter brought up, for the first time, the possibility of an American boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow. His mention of the Games is brief, only to say that although

the United States would prefer not to withdraw from the Olympic Games scheduled in Moscow this summer, the Soviet Union must realize that its continued aggressive actions will endanger both the participation of athletes and the travel to Moscow by spectators who would normally wish to attend the Olympic games.<sup>109</sup>

This was Carter's first indication that if the Soviets did not withdraw from Afghanistan, their dreams of hosting a spectacular Olympic Games would be crushed.

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<sup>109</sup> Kenny Moore, "The Decision: No Go on Moscow."

Prior to giving his State of the Union Address, Carter addressed Congress to brief them on the topics of his speech, highlighting his foreign policy aims for the presidency. While speaking about his foreign policy objectives, Carter discussed the tumultuous East-West relations. Of particular significance was the condemnation of the "Soviet invasion as a threat to their independence and security."<sup>110</sup> Within the same paragraph, Carter mentioned the Iran hostage crisis to say that the "continuing holding of American hostages in Iran is both an affront to civilized people everywhere, and an impediment to meeting the self-evident threat to widely shared common interests."<sup>111</sup> The juxtaposition of the Afghanistan and Iran crises indicate the deep connection between the two that existed in Carter's mind. He indicated this more explicitly when he further clarified his foreign policy aims, reiterating, "we have no basic quarrel with the nation, the revolution, or the people of Iran. The threat to them comes not from American policy but from Soviet actions in the region."<sup>112</sup> Carter viewed the Soviets as a direct threat to Iran, and therefore action against the Soviets would have a direct impact on Iran. In describing the steps the White House took with regard to imposing economic sanctions on the Soviets, Lloyd Cutler, White House Counsel, stated in his exit interview, "We had gone through lists of things we might do, that I might mention in this connection, both in the Iranian situation and in the case of Afghanistan."<sup>113</sup> There seemed to be an implicit connection between the Iran situation and Afghanistan, and the White House was involved with resolving both of those pressing

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<sup>110</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents," 1980, Federal Register Library, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=fedreg&id=0&handle=hein.fedreg/wcpd01604>.

<sup>111</sup> Carter, "Weekly Compilation."

<sup>112</sup> Carter, "Weekly Compilation."

<sup>113</sup> Lloyd Cutler, Lloyd Cutler Exit Interview, March 2, 1981, Jimmy Carter Library, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Cutler.pdf>.

issues simultaneously. Therefore it should not be surprising that the actions Carter decided to take against the Soviet Union were really a reaction to the Iran hostage crisis.

In addition to violating Afghani rights, the Soviet Union violated the rights of its own citizens. The Soviet government exiled Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov, an act which was deplored by the United States government who released a statement that “this denial of basic freedoms is a direct violation of the Helsinki Accords and a blow to the aspirations of all mankind to establish respect for human rights.”<sup>114</sup> Carter took this violation of human rights as an affront to his presidency, since the focal point of his presidency and campaign was his devotion to protecting human rights nationally and abroad. In his State of the Union Address, Carter reaffirmed the United States’ position to “continue to support the growth of democracy and the protection of human rights... our support for human rights in other countries is in our own national interest as well as part of our national character.”<sup>115</sup> Carter viewed the protection of human rights as an integral part of the United States’ policies and persona.

Through Carter’s speeches, a lot of rhetoric is used to unite the American people and portray a united nation that condemns other nations in violation of human rights. The Olympic Games represented a paramount symbol of patriotism and pride for one’s country. To choose not to send a team to compete in the Games was a huge loss for both the athletes and the nation. In order to employ a boycott, it was important for Carter to make sure that the American people supported the boycott and all that it stood for. In his speech at the United States Conference of Mayors, Carter reflected that the “capturing of 50 American

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<sup>114</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.” 194. The Helsinki Accords were signed in 1975 by 35 countries in an attempt to improve relations between the West and the Communist Bloc. One of the articles was a statement recognizing a respect for human rights and certain freedoms.

<sup>115</sup> Carter, “Weekly Compilation.”

hostages...has aroused the finest elements of the American spirit.”<sup>116</sup> Carter praised the American obsession with the hostages and their safe return as proof that “our commitment to human rights is not just a theory.”<sup>117</sup> Carter then immediately transitioned into a discussion about Afghanistan and the Soviet Union’s violations of human rights. He used the American response to the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to present a stark contrast between the ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union, stressing the importance of preserving human rights both nationally and abroad.

At the National Conference on Physical Fitness and Sports for All, Carter’s opening remarks directly addressed his proposition for a boycott against the Moscow Olympic Games in an effort to protect human rights. He reaffirmed his desire to exclude politics from the Olympics, and asserted his position that the boycott was not meant as a means of objecting to the policies of the Soviet Union, but as a statement against their aggression. Carter wanted to make it absolutely clear that “no country can trample the life and liberty of another and expect to conduct business or sports as usual with the rest of the world.”<sup>118</sup>

Although Carter was fighting for universal human rights, through his fierce devotion to human rights abroad, he compromised civil liberties at home. Carter succeeded in convincing Margaret Thatcher and the British government to support his boycott, yet the British Olympic Committee voted to defy their government, and sent an Olympic team to compete in Moscow. The White House began to fear that the USOC may have similar aspirations and thus adopted a more hardline approach in dealing with USOC members. Kenny Moore of *Sports Illustrated* explained that sports officials were invited to the White

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<sup>116</sup> Carter, "Weekly Compilation."

<sup>117</sup> Carter, "Weekly Compilation."

<sup>118</sup> Carter, "Weekly Compilation."



House for briefings in which it was made clear that “extraordinary measures would be taken to see to it that the USOC had no choice but to comply.”<sup>119</sup> In an April 10<sup>th</sup> speech Carter stated, “if legal actions are necessary to enforce [my] decision not to send a team to Moscow, then I will take those legal actions.”<sup>120</sup> When asked how the U.S. government would force athletes to comply with the boycott, presidential counsel, Lloyd Cutler, said “there are such things, you know, as passports, there are powers of the federal government...the US government could prevent US athletes from participating in the games.”<sup>121</sup> Carter had no qualms with taking legal action to deter athletes from being able to participate in the Moscow Games. Anita DeFrantz, a 1980 Olympic hopeful, brought legal action against the USOC when they voted not to send an Olympic team. In her lawsuit, she claimed that the USOC had been coerced to arrive at that decision, and therefore, the decision should not be upheld. In her statement she declared, “anyone who would sacrifice liberty for temporary security deserves neither security nor liberty. That’s what it was about. The USOC was afraid of what the President said he would do. It’s our liberty to make decisions.”<sup>122</sup> DeFrantz argued that the athletes’ and USOC’s autonomy to make decisions was taken away from them. However, ultimately she was not successful in her lawsuit, and the decision to boycott the Games was upheld.

The U.S. government had been careful not to intercede with the Olympic movement since the inception of the Games, but in 1980, the President could not stand by and allow

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<sup>119</sup> Moore, “The Decision: No Go on Moscow.”

<sup>120</sup> “DeFrantz v. United States Olympic Com., 492 F. Supp. 1181 (D.D.C. 1980),” *Justia Law*, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/492/1181/2308718/>.

<sup>121</sup> Larry Eldridge, “A Summer Olympics Storm Rumbles Over Winter Games,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 1980, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/512131554?accountid=10226>.

<sup>122</sup> “DeFrantz v. United States Olympic Com., 492 F. Supp. 1181 (D.D.C. 1980).”

the Olympics to proceed normally. Carter believed a big move was necessary to show the American people, and the world, that no nation could violate human rights without penalty. The Iran hostage crisis continued to worsen during Carter's presidency, and he was unable to save the American hostages. To bolster support for his campaign, Carter believed that a boycott of the Moscow Games was necessary. However, Carter experienced many obstacles which he did not anticipate as a result of being unfamiliar with the Olympic protocol and the role of the National Committees, and consequently ended up compromising the one thing he was trying to fight for-human rights and civil liberties.

#### Chapter 4: The Failure of the 1980 Olympic Boycott

Although the United States followed through with a boycott of the Games and succeeded in convincing 62 other nations to join them in protest, the boycott ultimately failed to achieve its goals. Despite the boycott, 81 nations participated in the Games, and 36 world records and 74 Olympic records were set.<sup>123</sup> Despite the blatant display of politics surrounding the Games, the Moscow Organizing Committee worked hard to maintain the Olympic ideals and ensure that the Games were carried out successfully. Brezhnev declared the boycott a failure before the Games even began as he welcomed participating athletes from countries from all over the world. Lord Killanin, president of the IOC, further emphasized the point when he thanked the athletes “who have shown their independence to travel to compete, despite many pressures placed on them.”<sup>124</sup> This statement was made in reference to the covert pressure that governments were forcing on the athletes.

The president of the organizing committee for the 1980 Games, Ignati Novikov, credited the International Olympic community and international sports world with the success of the Summer Games. Novikov believed the international support was critical, especially in the face of the anti-Olympic campaign spearheaded by U.S. President Carter, which Novikov described as “unprecedented political interference in Olympic sports. Covert and overt pressure was brought to bear on international and national sports organizations.”<sup>125</sup> It was clear to members

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<sup>123</sup> “Games of the XXII Olympiad Moscow 1980” (Moscow: Organising Committee of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, 1980), <http://library.la84.org/6oic/OfficialReports/1980/or1980v1.pdf>, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Steele, “Games Spectacle Scores in War of Words,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/186192274/1EB4C549A1EC4E06PQ/47?accountid=10226>.

<sup>125</sup> “Games of the XXII Olympiad Moscow 1980.”

of the international community that the U.S. government was involving itself in the Olympic proceedings in an unprecedented manner, and using its position in world affairs as leverage to enforce the U.S. athletes, and other nations to comply with the boycott. This chapter explores the consequences of the 1980 Olympic boycott and shows how the boycott failed to achieve Carter's goals.

Carter explicitly stated that his intention of boycotting the Moscow Games was in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter gave an ultimatum to the Soviets that if they did not withdraw their troops from Afghanistan by February 20, 1980 the U.S. would not attend the Olympic Games in Moscow. Since the Soviets failed to withdraw their troops by the deadline, Carter followed through with his threat of a boycott of the Games. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter had proposed different avenues for sanctions and punishments. The athletes who were to compete in the Summer Olympics released a statement regarding the boycott in which they argued that "the purpose of such a boycott will not be fulfilled. The Soviet Union will not alter its foreign policy under the threat of a boycott...we must have sanctions against such actions."<sup>126</sup> Anita Defrantz, a 1980 Olympic hopeful, stated "I just don't see that it will have any effect on anybody but the athletes, and I don't believe the world is with us on this. What does it say about our foreign policy that our only weapon is the Olympic team? That is just plain shocking."<sup>127</sup> It was evident to even the apolitically inclined athletes that an Olympic boycott would have an insignificant economic effect on the Soviet Union. They believed that direct economic sanctions would have more of an effect on Soviet foreign policy than a boycott of the

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<sup>126</sup> Committee on Foreign Relations United State Senate, "1980 Summer Olympics Boycott," January 28, 1980, 60.

<sup>127</sup> Anita L. Defrantz, *An Olympian's Oral History*, May 13, 2001, <http://library.la84.org/6oic/OralHistory/OHDeFrantz.pdf>.

Games. The athletes were correct, that the boycott proved to be ineffective in changing the Soviet's foreign policy, as the Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan until 1989.

While Carter cited the situation in Afghanistan as the impetus for the boycott, this thesis has argued that Carter also utilized the boycott as a response to the Iran hostage crisis. By taking a hardline approach with the Soviets, he hoped to send a strong message to Iran that the United States did not tolerate abuses to human rights. During an election year, one of the most critical points in the campaign was the hostage crisis in Iran, and in seeking reelection Carter could not stand idly by and let the crisis go unresolved.<sup>128</sup> However, the threat of a boycott did nothing to assuage the Iran hostage crisis. In April of 1980 Carter finally took military action in an attempt to rescue the American hostages being held in Iran, but the mission was unsuccessful and resulted in casualties for the U.S., tanking Carter's popularity in the polls for the upcoming presidential election.

It is reasonable to consider Carter's desire to boycott the Games as a political move to bolster support for his campaign during an election year. Press agencies from the U.S. and the Soviet Union were quick to point out that Carter had announced the threat of a boycott on the eve of the Iowa Caucus, the first step in the selection of delegates to the political conventions.<sup>129</sup> Although in a news conference following the failure of the Iran hostage rescue mission, Carter continuously insisted that throughout the Iranian crisis his actions were not politically motivated, it was evident to Edward Walsh of *The Washington Post* that the rescue mission was "the most desperate act of his presidency."<sup>130</sup> The Iran

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<sup>128</sup> Barry Sussman, "55% Favor Use of Force in Iran," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147235879/5E9435DBE43B427CPQ/24?accountid=10226>.

<sup>129</sup> Anthony Austin, "Tass Says Carter Is Playing Politics With Olympics," *New York Times*, January 22, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/121377068/FE7C552EFB140DAPQ/2?accountid=10226>.

<sup>130</sup> Edward Walsh, "President Defends Decision to Order Raid in Iran," *The Washington Post*, April 30, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147232258/5E9435DBE43B427CPQ/37?accountid=10226>.

crisis proved to be a trying event in Carter's political campaign, and his campaign director, Tim Kraft, acknowledged, "the political effect of the campaign crisis is dicey and unpredictable. We know it can't help us."<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, Carter's reelection campaign was unsuccessful, and his failure in dealing with the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the 1980 Olympic boycott tarnished his presidency, forcing the United States to elect a different President, Ronald Reagan.

Another factor that was highly influential in the failure of the boycott was the media. By the time of the 1980 Olympic Games, the media played a central role in the Games. NBC had paid 87 million dollars for the United States television rights to the 1980 Games. With the United States threatening to boycott the Olympic Games, there was uncertainty over how NBC should proceed with preparation for the Games. Ultimately, Carter ordered a halt on the shipment of all American exports to Moscow that were to be used for the Games, and barred NBC from finishing their payments and sending their equipment to Moscow to televise the Games.<sup>132</sup> As a result, NBC forfeited its rights to televise the Games, resulting in a monetary loss of at least 20 million dollars that would have been gained through advertisements, and high audience ratings, and other expenses not covered by insurance.<sup>133</sup> Despite NBC losing the broadcasting rights for the Moscow Games, the Games were still popularized by the media in other countries. Television networks from 59 different countries broadcasted the Games, and 1.5 billion people worldwide watched the

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<sup>131</sup> Martin Schram, "Public Frustration Over Iran Threatens Carter Campaign," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147272046/2B29465BF66944FBPQ/36?accountid=10226>.

<sup>132</sup> Barry Lorge, "U.S. Halts All Exports For Games," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/147300529/3EA16009260B4B72PQ/3?accountid=10226>.

<sup>133</sup> Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 126.

1980 Olympic Games. In addition to the television broadcasts, 5,500 journalists were accredited to report in Moscow for the entirety of the Games.<sup>134</sup>

The magnetism of the spectacle of the Olympic Games, albeit the political controversy surrounding the Games, eclipsed the moral arguments that were made when the boycott was first organized. By looking at the media coverage and spectator response to the Olympic Games throughout various countries, the power that the Games held over the spectators was evident. In London, sports columnists argued that the British should not let the boycott interfere with their pride of the British victories at the Games. The tabloid *Sun* declared that, "even the tragedy of Russia's rape of Afghanistan cannot obscure the fact that Britain has something to cheer about in the magnificent victories at the Olympic Games."<sup>135</sup> British nationalism was strengthened by the victories they achieved at the Games, and the media coverage of the Games in Britain made little to no mention of the situation in Afghanistan. Although the Afghanistan crisis was mentioned in the British press and government leading up to the Games, the nationalism and the pride that British victories evoked eclipsed any doubts of their participation at the Games.

While the Games were broadcasted throughout many different countries, a number of Western European countries had prevented or limited the broadcasting of the Games out of embarrassment for joining the boycott movement, and not participating at the Games.<sup>136</sup> However, even among countries that did not participate in Moscow there was a high level of interest in the Games. This is evident by looking at the case of West Germany; after West Germany joined the U.S.-led boycott, the Games were no longer going to be televised in

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<sup>134</sup> "Games of the XXII Olympiad Moscow 1980, 8."

<sup>135</sup> Dusko Doder, "Flawed Olympics Still Hold the World's Attention," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147251588/1EB4C549A1EC4E06PQ/2?accountid=10226>.

<sup>136</sup> Doder, "Flawed Olympics."

West Germany. Many people flocked to East Germany in order to watch the competitions from the Olympic Games.<sup>137</sup> In the United States though, where broadcasting of the Games was severely cut, there was little interest among Americans in the athletic competitions because athletes from their country were not competing. The strong feelings of pride and nationalism that existed when watching fellow countrymen compete in sport was lost in the 1980 Games with the U.S. boycott.

The news coverage in the Soviet Union surrounding the controversy of the 1980 Olympic Games portrayed a very different version of the boycott than what was portrayed in the Western media. The Soviet press sought to place the blame of the Olympic boycott entirely on President Carter. In discussions about the boycott in the Soviet press, the editorials downplayed the connection between the invasion of Afghanistan and the cause for the Olympic boycott.<sup>138</sup> Instead, the Soviet editorials, as quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, speculated that "Carter was conniving to gut the Games simply to improve his political prospects in an election year."<sup>139</sup> In this way, the Soviet press accused Carter of exploiting the Games for his own political pursuits, and portrayed the Soviets as the victims of American politics. The Soviet media was also very meticulous with what it chose to display on television at the Games themselves. When 15 nations marched under the Olympic flag in the opening ceremony instead of under their national flags, the television cameras zoomed in on the name of the country listed on the plaque, so that the viewers were unable to see the flag at all.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Doder, "Flawed Olympics."

<sup>138</sup> Dan Fisher, "Moscow Steps Up Attack on Carter's Boycott Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/162683344/FE7C552EFB140DAPQ/21?accountid=10226>.

<sup>139</sup> Jim Gallagher, "Carter's Playing Games with the Games: Soviets," *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/170145520/FE7C552EFB140DAPQ/68?accountid=10226>.

<sup>140</sup> Jonathan Steele, "Games Spectacle Scores in War of Words."



An aspect of Carter's motivation in boycotting the Games was to inflict harm on the Soviet Union's pride. The Soviet Union had invested an immense amount of funds and resources into building the Olympic stadiums and planning the opening and closing ceremonies to ensure that the 1980 Games were the most spectacular Olympics to date. Carter hoped that by boycotting the Games, many other nations would join in protest, resulting in a low turnout for the Moscow Games. Having few nations participate in the Games would demote the level of competition, lower the source of income from the Games, and disappoint the Soviets due to all of the effort they had put into making the Games magnificent. Carter had hoped that this blow to the Soviet's esteem would spur an internal rising against the Soviet leadership, which would incentivize the Soviets to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. However, despite the boycott, the Games proved to be successful in terms of the athletic prowess and level of athletic competition. The ceremonies and Olympic rituals were executed with fanfare and extravagance that elicited pride from the Soviet spectators. Furthermore, due the censorship of the Soviet press, the Soviet people were unaware of the exact causes for the U.S. boycott, and believed that Carter was using the boycott for his own personal benefit. Therefore, there was no internal uprising or an assault on the Soviets' pride as Carter had anticipated. Ultimately, the boycott failed to achieve any of the goals that Carter had intended for it to fulfill, and the American athletes and spectators bore the brunt of the damage inflicted by the boycott.

### Conclusion

The foundation of the Olympic movement aimed to foster an international community in which countries politically at odds with each other could put aside their political differences to interact with each other in a peaceful manner through sports. The Olympic Charter emphasized that the competition at the Olympic Games was meant to be “between individuals and not between countries.”<sup>141</sup> The Games were meant to bridge the gap between the nations, not widen it. However, although the achievements of a particular athlete were celebrated, it was most often within the context of the country that they were representing. Certain Olympic rituals, such as the presentation of the national flags of the victors, and the playing of the gold medalists’ national anthem, made it difficult to separate the athlete from the nation he represented. These rituals at the Olympic Games encouraged the development of a strong sense of nationalism at the Games. The Olympic Games had become too popular a nationalistic forum to eliminate such symbols of national honor. Espy identified that “competitors are proud to compete for their countries, and spectators do not simply identify with individual winners or competitors, but the countries they represent.”<sup>142</sup> Therefore, instead of promoting international brotherhood, the Olympic Games were more effective in fostering patriotism and pride for the individual nations competing at the Games.

Prior to the 1980 Olympic Games, the United States government had been uninvolved in the selection of Olympic teams and the Olympic proceedings. The United

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<sup>141</sup> “Olympic Charter 1980 Provisional Edition” (Comite International Olympique, 1980), <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Olympic-Studies-Centre/List-of-Resources/Official-Publications/Olympic-Charters/EN-1980-Olympic-Charter-Provisional.pdf>.

<sup>142</sup> Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 197.

States government had even gone so far as to decry politics at the Olympic Games, criticizing individuals at the 1968, 1972, and 1976 Games for making blatant political demonstrations, thus imposing politics into an arena in which it did not belong. Therefore, President Carter's action was monumental, in that he altered the relationship that had existed between the federal government and the Olympic organizations. The boycott represented that Carter viewed the Olympic Games similarly to the Black athletes at the 1968 Games who raised their fists in a black power salute, and to the terrorists at the 1972 Munich Games: as an ideal stage for enacting international protests and retaliation.<sup>143</sup> The boycott was seen as hypocritical because previous Presidents had condemned overt political displays at the Olympic Games, yet Carter explicitly inserted politics into the Games to advance the United States' and his own agenda. Furthermore, if the U.S. viewed the Games as powerful enough to be used as a political weapon, it was contradictory for the U.S. to boycott the 1980 Games, and yet host the 1984 Games. The politically motivated boycott of the 1980 Games left the 1984 Games, which were to be hosted by the United States, vulnerable to boycotts from the Soviets and other communist countries in retaliation, threatening to cause more harm to American pride than the boycott of the Moscow Games had inflicted on the Soviets.

With the emergence of mass leisure and the growth of the Olympics as a prominent social institution, according to Martin Vinokur, it was inevitable that "with this new and larger audience, sport has increasingly been used as a vehicle of international political

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<sup>143</sup> Bill Rhoden, "Why a Boycott Contains Peril," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 17, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/538267607/E888D5DD24CF4777PQ/1?accountid=10226>.

influence.”<sup>144</sup> The increasing role that the Olympic Games, and sports in general, played in people’s daily lives as a form of mass leisure, entertainment, and fun, enabled sports to be manipulated to achieve political ends. The 1980 Olympic boycott revealed the popularity of the Games, and the importance attached by governments, businesses, and the public to participation in them. Espy pointed out that the United States and Western leaders should have realized with the 1980 boycott that “participation in the Games is everything, non-participation is a soon forgotten memory.”<sup>145</sup> Participation brought about more glory and national pride than a boycott ever would. The best way to protest against a nation’s policies was to compete at the Games in that nation’s country and emerge victorious. The ice hockey match at the 1980 Winter Games is evidence of the power of participation and victory. The ice hockey competition is still remembered with pride, as “the miracle on ice,” and is recalled more vividly and fondly than the memories of the 1980 Summer boycott.

Through Carter’s approach to the boycott, it was evident that he perceived the Games as just another sporting event, insignificant to anyone but the Soviets. However, this assumption could not have been more inaccurate. The Games had become the most popular forum of international participation and recognition. A country may have been willing to take firm action in the United Nations, such as condemn the Soviet Union, but it was quite a different matter to do the same at the Olympic Games.<sup>146</sup>

A dominant feature of the importance of the Games was their visibility. Due to the surge in media coverage and international broadcasting, the Games were seen by the whole world. For each spectator watching the Games, whether live or on television, it was his

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<sup>144</sup> Martin Barry Vinokur, *More Than a Game* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1988), 115.

<sup>145</sup> Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 175-176.

<sup>146</sup> Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, 197.

country that was competing and, possibly, winning. The Olympic Games united the nation in support of its athletes, and imbued the spectators with a sense of devotion and commitment to the outcome of the Games. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the support of the Olympics was that many people, athletes and spectators, enjoyed them.<sup>147</sup> As a result, the nation did not want to be caught up in politics that would interfere with their enjoyment of the Games. The 1980 Olympic boycott took away the opportunity for the American people to gather together in support of their athletes and their nation, and to be entertained with the high level of competition that the Olympics produced.

Due to the impact that sports had on people's social and political lives, victory at the Olympic Games had the potential to instill national pride among the athletes and the spectators, that ultimately could have spurred support for Carter. However, the boycott robbed the nation of the opportunity to coalesce, and resulted in another grievance against the Carter administration, which ultimately resulted in his loss of the presidential campaign. Although the 1980 Olympic Games were rife with politics on an unprecedented scale, the mass enjoyment and spectacle of the Olympic Games prevented the 1980 Games from destroying the entire Olympic movement. Spectators worldwide perpetuated excitement for the Games, and the Americans were eager to participate in the next Games, to reestablish American pride and national unity in the sports arena.

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<sup>147</sup> Lincoln Allison, *The Politics of Sport* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 239.

## Figures



Figure 1. Official Poster of the 1980 Moscow Games  
<https://www.olympic.org/moscow-1980>



Figure 2. Opening ceremony of the Moscow Games. Nations can be seen standing under the Olympic flag instead of under their national flag.  
<https://www.olympic.org/moscow-1980>



Figure 3. Opening Ceremony at the Moscow Games. Misha the bear was the mascot for these Games  
<https://www.olympic.org/moscow-1980>

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