

The Interference of Politics in the Olympic Games, and How the U.S. Media Contribute to It

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Abstract:

In February 2014, Russia will host the Olympic Games for only the second time in its history. Once again, the Olympic spirit—as defined and espoused by the International Olympic Committee—will clash with the political interests that overshadow the Games. This paper examines the political undertones of the 1980 Summer Olympics, hosted by Moscow and which took place during an ice-cold period of the Cold War, and asks whether similar undertones will be on display next year. The 1980 Games were a phenomenal success for Soviet athletes and their Eastern European colleagues. However, in the absence of the United States and more than 50 other nations, the political frame from a Western context was that of athletes from a corrupt system competing alongside their comrades. The boycott of these Games demonstrated the power of the White House and the often lapdog quality of the American media. Now as the Games return to Russia, the issue of whether a Cold War-like mentality will influence U.S. media reporting of the 2014 Sochi Olympics must be asked. The conflicting images in Western news media discourse of Russian president Vladimir Putin and his “Communist past” combined with a tepid diplomatic relationship between his government and the Obama administration provide evidence that a negative portrayal of Russia and therefore its athletes will be displayed in February 2014. And yet there is no impetus for a boycott next year. This paper explores why.

Keywords: 1980 Olympics; International Olympic Committee; Jimmy Carter; Olympics; USSR

Résumé:

En février 2014, la Russie sera l'hôte des jeux olympiques pour une deuxième fois dans son histoire. Une fois de plus, l'esprit olympique, tel que défini et soutenu par le Comité international olympique (CIO), se heurte aux intérêts politiques des jeux. Cet article examine les contours politiques des jeux d'été de 1980 dont Moscou en était l'hôte pendant la période de guerre froide et se questionne sur la similarité de ces contours avec ceux des jeux de 2014. Les jeux de 1980 ont été un succès phénoménal pour les athlètes soviets et leurs collègues de l'Europe de l'Est. En l'absence des États-Unis et de plus de 50 autres nations, le cadre politique, selon le contexte occidental, était un système corrompu. Le boycott de ces jeux a affermi le pouvoir de la maison blanche et des médias américains. Étant donné que les jeux auront lieu en Russie en 2014, est-ce que la mentalité de la guerre froide influencera le reportage des médias américain des jeux? Les images conflictuelles du discours du président Russe Vladimir Putin et du passé communiste de la Russie par les médias américains, combinés avec les relations diplomatiques tendues entre le gouvernement de Putin et l'administration d'Obama fournissent l'évidence d'une représentation négative de la Russie et de ses athlètes en 2014. Et il n'y a toujours pas de menace de boycott à l'horizon. Cet article examine pourquoi.

Mots-clés: Comité international olympique; Jimmy Carter; Olympiques; Olympiques de 1980; URSS

Introduction

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) maintains that politics—domestic or international—has no place in the planning or the executing of the Olympic Games. However, over time the IOC has been unsuccessful in preventing politics from interfering in the Olympics, as it has also engaged in it.

By exploring this tension, this paper first examines how the IOC and the Soviet leadership were unable to prevent a U.S.-led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics, hosted by Moscow. The boycott was orchestrated by President Jimmy Carter, who believed a Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan had to be met with some kind of powerful international statement. For him, the boycott was part of that strategy.

This research also demonstrates that the administration's ability to use the power of the presidency to generate favorable media coverage contributed to rallying support for the boycott, even though a majority of America's potential Olympic athletes opposed the decision.

This research also is timely. In February 2014, Sochi, Russia, hosts the Winter Olympics, and the Games come at a time of renewed tension between the United States and Russia. In the middle of 2013, friction developed after the Kremlin refused to hand over Edward Snowden, who had illegally downloaded and then gave to journalists information pertaining to the National Security Agency's (NSA) telephone surveillance on American citizens and foreigners. Snowden

fled to Hong Kong and then Russia to evade U.S. prosecution. The Russian government granted him temporary asylum, ensuring the American government could not extradite him. Shortly thereafter, the Russian government enacted anti-homosexuality laws that President Barack Obama voiced strong disagreement with. Building on this, research explores whether the current administration—like its predecessor in 1980—uses a sporting event to advance its political agenda. The critical question is whether the Obama administration links the legitimacy of the Sochi Games to Kremlin actions and policies.

Literature Review

Press nationalism asserts that the American media have allowed their political leaders, especially the executive branch, to dictate foreign news coverage about the communist world. Gans (1979) found that the American media prefer some foreign news stories over others. Among the topics more likely to be reported are stories that countries with extensive dealings with the United States, and reports that somehow suggest a communist country has been weakened because of an event or action. Government representatives define what these events mean. Many studies have demonstrated that U.S. government officials are the primary and often only sources used in the reporting of such stories.

Dickson (1992) examined news coverage of the removal of President Manuel Noriega from Panama and found that U.S. government-sponsored themes justifying his ouster were dominant in news reports. The government targeted Noriega as an international drug dealer; the media reported these allegations, often not asking whether there was evidence to support the claims. Kieh (1992) added that the media also ignored the long-standing political affiliation that the U.S. had had with Noriega before he was swept aside. In another study, Dickson (1989) found that U.S. sources regularly appeared in media discourse about elections in Nicaragua while pro-Sandinista voices rarely were. Meanwhile, McCoy (1992) found that favorable coverage was offered about the government in El Salvador, recognized as an American ally.

Press nationalism also has influenced coverage in such disparate locations as the Middle East and Asia. Mowlana (1984) noted that the Shah was routinely characterized as a benevolent leader of Iran while the Islamic insurgency was a reaction to improvements taking place in the country. Chang (1989) determined that whenever U.S. presidents made favorable statements about the Chinese more front-page articles and positive editorials about that country followed.

Herman's and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model is relevant to this research. They suggested that as the government and other dominant private interests controlled news flow that there was a decline in the number of voices framing news coverage. They identified five filters that they argued had assisted in shutting out opposition voices. The authors criticized the first two which dealt with financial matters because they believed that these opened the door for the media to trade off economic support for non-critical coverage of their business partners.

Official sources comprised the third filter. Government agencies and spokespeople offered ample opportunities to explain Washington's position on a particular issue and therefore contributed to the idea that a journalist was covering an event objectively. But they also provided the news media with the facilities they needed in order to do their job. In other words, according to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the media literally could go to one place to get their information and prepare their stories. Too often, however, this arrangement meant that no outside sources needed to be or were contacted.

The fourth filter, flak, recognized that private or non-profit groups could compel the media to limit the boundaries of news coverage by threatening a public-relations campaign against them. The possibility of losing advertisers or public support was enough to rein in the media.

The final filter was anti-communism, an easy-to-make allegation that rarely demanded evidence and guaranteed public support. In short, a media organization seen as being soft on communism (or a U.S. “enemy”) was guaranteed a hard time by the critics. Herman and Chomsky concluded that the propaganda model allowed for the government and other dominant private interests to receive favorable coverage, to appear regularly in news discourse and to know that their critics would not be given a voice.

Entman (1991) suggested framing results from the keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images that are emphasized within news accounts. Framing allows for a single interpretation to dominate news coverage; any other theme is ignored or given minimal consideration. He noted that government officials often crafted news frames that were then presented to and accepted by the mainstream media. Entman reviewed U.S. media coverage of the downing of two commercial airplanes and how government leaders defined them. Summarizing briefly, the shooting down of a Korean Air Lines plane by a Soviet military aircraft was a deliberate act that may have been approved by the Soviet government. However, the U.S. government assigned no such moral culpability when one of its naval ships shot down an Iranian jetliner.

The theories overlap in a few key areas. First, government officials make news, and they also provide an “official” interpretation of events that mainstream media endorse (often without critical examination). The U.S. government finds itself often exempt from blame, a benefit shared by its allies, but hostile governments, especially if they are communist, are easy targets for blame, ridicule, or disdain.

The media’s effort, whether deliberate or forced, at reducing the number of voices in framing news compounds the problem. Employing the “news net” approach suggested by Tuchman (1973: 110) means that gathering information becomes a sure thing. Selected individuals and institutions are guaranteed to provide material that is presumed newsworthy because it flows from a credible, legitimate, and frequently used source. But this arrangement also allows the source to determine what kind of information, and how much, is released to the media at a particular time.

Thus, in the end, the reliance on a limited set of sources, however credible they might be, ensures that the public receives a consistent spin on the news. That spin is expected to be negative when it revolves around a communist government and/or the newsmakers from a communist society.

The Call for and Development of an Olympic Boycott, and the Media’s Support of It

Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan on December 27, 1979. That act eventually led to an American-sponsored boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics, which were hosted by Moscow. The boycott marked the first time that the United States did not take part in the modern Games, and led the *Los Angeles Times* to note it “was a departure from Washington’s previous hands-off policy in connection with sports” (Shannon, 1980, January 13).

As early as January 4, 1980, President Carter indicated that a continued Soviet military presence in Afghanistan guaranteed that the U.S. government would not allow its Olympic team to participate in the Summer Games. In a nationally televised address, he outlined the economic and political sanctions that the United States was imposing on the USSR because of the invasion. The *New York Times* noted that toward the end of his speech, he said

Although the United States would prefer not to withdraw from the Olympic games scheduled for 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 normally wish to attend the Olympic games.

(Transcript of . . . , 1980, January 5)

On January 24, the House of Representatives voted 386 to 12 to support the president's call for either transferring the Games out of Moscow, canceling them outright, or a boycott. Four days later, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously passed a similar resolution. On January 29, the full Senate voted 88 to 4 in favor of the resolution. Meantime, *Newsweek* reported that 47 percent of Americans it polled had indicated that it was acceptable for the U.S. to threaten a boycott in order to potentially influence what the Soviets were doing, 56 percent said they favored a boycott, and 68 percent said that the U.S. government should try to get the Games moved from Moscow (Mayer, 1980, January 28).

America's potential Olympic athletes and their governing bodies viewed a possible boycott differently. The *Los Angeles Times* picked up an Associated Press report that had polled thirty-two of the forty-seven members of the United States Olympic Committee's (USOC) Athletes Advisory Council and found that twenty (62.5 percent) favored a U.S. Olympic presence in Moscow. Six (18.75 percent) did not want their team to take part in the Games if the crisis in Afghanistan lingered. The remaining six either had no opinion or refused to answer (Poll . . . , 1980, January 24). Two days later, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that cyclists, weightlifters, handball and volleyball players had issued a statement condemning Carter. They said, "The use of an Olympic boycott is not in the best interests of world peace" (Reich, 1980, January 26).

Carter's efforts not only were strengthened by the Congress but also by two of America's most influential newspapers. A review of the unsigned, staff-written, and syndicated editorials and cartoons in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* revealed that the newspapers agreed that the boycott would be an appropriate response to the Soviet invasion. The opinion pieces spotlighted two often inter-connected themes. The first was that the United States should stay away from Moscow, and the second was that any attempt by any American athlete to undercut President Carter's position was unacceptable.

Perhaps the most strident editorial in either newspaper appeared in the *New York Times* on May 24, 1980, the final day for nations to decide whether they would send their Olympians to Moscow, calling the boycott effort a success. Under the headline "Th Mscw Olmpcs [sic]", which symbolized that something was missing from the upcoming Summer Games, the newspaper claimed,

The American-led campaign to boycott the Moscow Summer Games has scored, if not a knockout, at least a victory on points. . . . A point that ought to be borne

home to the Soviet people is that European athletes, unlike their own, have the right to embarrass their governments without being flung into the gulag.

Neither the Soviet Union nor the IOC believed Carter had the power to bring about a multi-nation boycott. Olympic officials repeatedly argued that he was violating one of the most important tenets of the Olympic Movement: the separation of politics and sports. The rhetoric emanating from the USSR was more virulent than that coming from Lausanne, the IOC's headquarters. As early as mid-January, the *New York Times* reported that a Soviet sports newspaper had accused the president of "using sport as an instrument of political blackmail" (Austin, 1980, January 14). Two days later, Vsevolod Sovva, the head of Russia's Olympic press information department, was quoted by in *Los Angeles Times* as saying, "The Olympics and a boycott are incompatible. Any such boycott and the Olympics would cease to exist" (Klose, 1980, January 16). On January 31, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Soviet news agency TASS also suggested that the administration was violating the Olympic tradition of separating sports and politics. It added, "The USSR Olympic Committee, true to the ideals of the Olympic Movement, condemns attempts at using sport as a means of political pressure" (Moscow . . . , 1980, January 31).

Moretti (2002) found that the president's efforts were regularly criticized in all Soviet media. For example, Sergei Pavlov, the chairman of the Soviet Olympic Committee, claimed that the president had "decided to declare war" on the Olympics. The newspaper *Pravda* blamed the United States for causing the crisis in Afghanistan. Carter's administration was accused of "continuing to interfere in the internal affairs of the Afghan people . . . [which] has assumed the form of outright aggression against the sovereign, independent state of Afghanistan and its legitimate government", according to the newspaper.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in mid-March that the United States had until May 24 to officially accept its invitation to the Moscow Games, and the USOC urged the president to wait until just before that date before committing to a boycott (Reich, 1980, March 16). Nevertheless, on March 21, Carter announced that the U.S. team definitely would not attend the Summer Olympics. As the president addressed approximately 150 former, current, or potential Olympians at the White House, *New York Times* quoted him saying, "I can't say at this moment what other nations will not go to the Summer Olympics in Moscow. Ours will not go. I say that not with any equivocation. The decision has been made" (Litsky, 1980, March 22).

By early April, Carter's boycott call was losing steam. Western European National Olympic Committees (NOCs) were refusing to follow the public and private pleas of their governments that sought to join it, the IOC was not listening to calls to remove the Games from Moscow, U.S. athletes were divided about its merits, and the USOC was, according to the *New York Times* "in revolt" (Weisman, 1980, April 3). Don Miller, the USOC's executive director, suggested that the organization might refuse to support the president. Carter immediately turned up the heat on USOC officials. According to the *New York Times*, he hinted that his administration would use any legal means necessary, including refusing to issue travel visas and cutting government funding of the Olympic program, to keep American athletes home (Weisman, 1980, April 10).

There was no question that the USOC was in financial trouble, and that Carter used it to his advantage. U.S. Olympic officials acknowledged that the confusion about a boycott had cut into the corporate sponsorship money it was receiving; the *New York Times* reported estimates placed that figure at \$1.2 million (Weisman, 1980, March 3). Meanwhile, unnamed officials

within the White House admitted that they had talked to Congress about either withholding a \$4.2 million appropriation or possibly revoking the USOC's tax-exempt status. Furthermore, at the end of March, the president began discussing with Olympic leaders the potential for increased amounts of government funding in the future in exchange for a firm commitment to the boycott. The *Los Angeles Times* added that the president also was working with the USOC's corporate sponsors to ensure that they did not donate any money to the organization until it publicly sided with him (Reich, 1980, April 5).

The president returned to the idea that the Soviet invasion was a real threat to America's national security on April 8, when he sent USOC members a letter. In it, he again urged the membership to support the boycott, noting "a USOC decision to send a team to Moscow would be against our national interest and would damage our national security. It would indicate to the Soviets—and to the entire world—that the U.S. lacks the resolve to oppose Soviet aggression" (Allen, 1980).¹

By this point, the stress within the USOC was evident. U.S. Olympic officials announced the campaign had led to a division within its ranks and, as the *New York Times* reported, "many members resented what they viewed as undue pressure from the White House" (Vance . . . , 1980, April 9). Four days later, when the USOC voted whether it would send its team to Moscow, Vice President Walter Mondale addressed its members. He picked up on the theme that the U.S. had to set an example for other nations to follow. "Above all, the decision you will make today is not a choice between a sports issue and a national security issue", he said. "For the President and Congress have made it clear that the Olympic boycott is a genuine element of America's response to the invasion of Afghanistan. It is an unambiguous statement of our national resolve. It is a keystone in our call to our allies for solidarity" (Weisman, 1980, April 13).

A majority of USOC members, setting aside whatever personal disagreement they might have had, agreed. In a 1,604-to-797 vote, they affirmed that the U.S. Olympic team would not compete in Moscow.² The *Los Angeles Times* quoted USOC President Robert Kane, who said, "More than anything else, the preservation of our patriotism and support of the President of the United States had to be reaffirmed. I'm completely satisfied it was the right decision" (Reich, 1980, April 13). The *New York Times'* account strongly suggested that America's Olympic organizers had made the "right decision" in siding with the president (Weisman, 1980, April 13). The newspapers' reporters in Moscow noted that the Soviet Union saw it differently. Both newspapers quoted TASS as saying the vote resulted from "unprecedented pressure and blackmail" from the White House (Soviet . . . , 1980, April 14).

The president's efforts to convince American Olympic officials and athletes to support a boycott drew substantial media attention; a subsequent lawsuit filed by multiple current or potential Olympians demanding his decision be declared illegal did not. The suit was filed on April 23. On the following day the *New York Times* devoted just four paragraphs to it, and no athlete or Olympic official was quoted (Boycott . . . , 1980, April 24). In a separate story, a *New York Times'* columnist issued an important reminder. "Maybe the athletes can convince the court that the decision [to boycott] damaged them but not one can prove that he or she would have made the Olympic team" (Smith, 1980, April 27). Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times* filed an eleven-paragraph story that quoted both the athletes' legal briefs and one particular athlete, who reasserted that the government had placed undue pressure on the USOC and American athletes (Goldman, 1980, April 24).

On May 13, attorneys argued their respective cases before United States District Judge John Pratt. Coverage in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* was sparse. The *New York*

Times picked up a wire service report, while readers of the *Los Angeles Times* were given a ten-paragraph story; the primary theme being Pratt's suggestion that he would deny the athletes' request. He said that he did not like "to do acts that were futile" or to "engage in confrontation with the executive branch" (Ostrow, 1980, May 14).

Pratt promised a quick decision, which he delivered just two days later and handed the president a clear victory. The *New York Times* provided a one-paragraph summary of the decision; no analysis was included, and no attorney or athlete was quoted (Weisman, 1980, May 17). The *Los Angeles Times* buried his decision in a story about a meeting between Carter and Lord Killanin, the IOC's president (Randolph & Ostrow, 1980, May 17).

The president never was able to persuade IOC officials, especially Killanin, to agree with him. The *New York Times* quoted Killanin as saying neither he nor the IOC was condoning what the Soviets had done, "but if we started to make political judgments it would be the end of the Games" (Apple, 1980, January 26). Killanin (1983) believed that Carter, "already scrambling for his political life", was using the potential for an Olympic boycott or postponement to boost his domestic political fortunes. Moreover, he believed that the president "was not fully informed" about the nuances of international sports and "this led to the trouble [with the boycott]". He concluded, "To my mind [Carter and members of his administration] had virtually no knowledge other than about American football and baseball, which if they had been in the Olympic Games, perhaps we wouldn't have had this boycott".

Killanin delivered his most passionate defense of the IOC and the Olympic Movement in February. At one point, he said:

Solutions to the political problems of the world are not the responsibility of sporting bodies such as the International Olympic Committee, but of the appropriate governmental organizations.

Unfortunately, since the conception of the modern Olympic Movement, governments have attempted to make use of it for political purposes. I have never denied or ignored the intrusion of politics into the Olympic Movement, and I believe it to be in all our interests that these intrusions must be resisted.

I would implore all those with different opinions and feelings: do not use the Olympic Games to divide the world, but to unite it—do not use athletes for the solution to political problems.

(International Olympic Committee, 1985: 101-102)

When the Summer Olympics began later that summer, the United States and more than fifty of its allies did not have athletes present in Moscow. The boycott marked the first and only time the U.S. had refused to participate in the Olympic Games.

It Could Not Happen Again, Right?

On February 7, 2014, the Russian city of Sochi will hold the Opening Ceremonies for the 2014 Winter Olympics. There is every indication that despite the ongoing geopolitical disputes involving the United States and Russia that the U.S. Olympic team will take part in those ceremonies and in those Games.

The most recent spat began with Russian president Vladimir Putin's refusal to extradite Edward Snowden to the U.S. Snowden announced during the summer of 2013 that he had

illegally downloaded information about the NSA, where he had worked as a contractor, and its surveillance on American citizens. Soon after giving his information to journalism, Snowden fled the United States for Hong Kong, where he remained for about two weeks before traveling to Russia. Immediately, President Obama's administration began demanding that Russia send Snowden to the U.S. to face justice. The *New York Times* reported President Putin's answer was clear—"nyet" (Herszenhorn, Barry & Baker, 2013, June 25).

Though angered by the decision, neither President Obama nor any member of his administration made any immediate public comment suggesting that the Russians' refusal to hand over Snowden would result in symbolic or other sanctions against Moscow. The words "Olympics" and "boycott" never were uttered by the president or a member of his administration. In fact, the Associated Press noted that only hint that the president was preparing to demonstrate his displeasure at Russia's perceived intransigence was an announcement that he might cancel a planned series of meetings with President Putin that were scheduled to take place a few days before those two men and other world leaders gathered in September in Russia for the G-20 meetings (Pace, 2013, July 19). He followed through with those threats a few days later.

When one U.S. senator, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, suggested to *The Hill* that the president ought to authorize a boycott of the Sochi Olympics because of the Kremlin's refusal to extradite Snowden to the United States (Herb, Pecquet & Sink, 2013, July 16), another top Republican, Speaker of the House John Boehner, said Sen. Graham was "dead wrong" for making such a statement. The Associated Press quoted Rep. Boehner as saying, "Why would we want to punish U.S. athletes who've been training for three years to compete in the Olympics over a traitor who can't find a place to call home?" (2013, July 17).

As the Snowden affair was unfolding, so, too, was a sharp tack right in Russia vis-à-vis the rights of homosexuals. In June, *The Guardian* reported the Russian Parliament had passed new laws banning gay propaganda "amid a Kremlin push to enshrine deeply conservative values that critics say already led to a sharp increase in anti-gay violence" (Elder, 2013, June 11). Multiple pro-LGBT individuals and groups prodded the White House and other Western governments to issue a boycott of the Sochi Games to indicate their disdain for the anti-homosexual laws. The *Los Angeles Times* noted such efforts were falling on deaf ears, writing "an international consensus was building that to boycott the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi would be counterproductive" (Williams, 2013, August 12).

President Obama was among them. Though expressing his disgust at his Russian counterpart for not agreeing to extradite Snowden and for pushing the anti-gay effort, the president announced the U.S. would neither lead nor take part in any boycott of the 2014 Olympics. The *New York Times* quoted him saying, "I want to just make very clear right now I do not think it's appropriate to boycott the Olympics. We've got a bunch of Americans out there who are training hard, who are doing everything they can to succeed" (Obama's . . . , 2013, August 10).

Discussion

What had changed? Why more than thirty years after one U.S. president had used the Olympics as a tool for political gain did another U.S. president soundly reject that strategy?

Perhaps the most important reason is political. President Barack Obama is not facing the electorate in 2014. In late 1979 and early 1980, the political winds were blowing strongly in the

face of Jimmy Carter. Therefore, a boycott became a rallying cry for him and for the nation. The current president is facing no such election difficulties.

Another important reason is that the Cold War is over. Yes, the U.S. and Russia often find themselves in dispute, but the overtly hostile relationship that existed between roughly 1948 and 1991 is not evident today. The two nations are not attempting to win the hearts and minds of people throughout the world, as they did during the Cold War, and they are not trying to validate their political, social and economic systems at the expense of the other. Their alliance in organizations such as the G-20 further ensures that they do not operate in opposing political camps.

There also are economic pressures that cannot be ignored. The Olympics are a bigger business now than they were in 1980. Zarnowski (1993) stated that despite the tremendous amount of research that exists about the Olympic Games, there remains no clear answer as to how much each Olympics actually cost. Zarnowski did cite a *New York Times* report quoting the mayor of Moscow saying the 1980 Games cost \$2 billion. That figure, if correct, pales in comparison to the estimated \$51 billion it will cost to put on the Sochi Games, a figure cited by the Associated Press (Buravchenko & Vasilyeva, 2013, February 7). Of course, these data represent just one method of understanding the economics of the Olympics. U.S. television rights—a primary income source for the IOC—is another. In 1980, NBC spent \$95.5 million to secure the U.S. television rights to the Moscow Games (Real, 2000). In 2011, the *New York Times* mentioned that NBC had agreed to a multi-year package of rights with the IOC that included a \$1 billion payout for the 2014 Olympics (Sandomir, 2011, June 7).

With the Olympics as a big business, there is an expectation from advertisers, broadcasters and other commercial interests that all nations eligible to participate in the Games will. And then there are the media. The previous research articles cited in this paper suggest that the U.S. government remains a potent force in dictating the amount and tone of coverage of a particular issue. In 1980, the White House banged the Olympic boycott drum loudly, and it saw that policy as integral to its response to a Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan. The U.S. media dutifully followed that line, offering few stories critical of it. The current president, though recognizing the political differences he has with his counterpart in Russia, is not going to boycott the Olympics over them. The U.S. media are dutifully following that line, suggesting that while voices of opposition do exist that the president has spoken and the issue is closed.

Conclusion

President Carter's pursuit of a boycott was, as mentioned by some journalists and scholars, a symbolic representation of America's anger at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In dollar terms, it cost the United States nothing. It was well-received by the electorate, which the president needed to attract in an election year. It did not require the deployment of American troops, an action that could have led to escalating tension with the Soviet Union and a larger war within south Asia or elsewhere. And the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* considered Carter's call for a boycott appropriate and its execution and results successful.

In doing so, the newspapers reinforced the media theories highlighted earlier in this paper, especially in their almost constant support of the president's pursuit of a boycott and the characterization of the Soviet Union as an amoral society determined to use any method available to advance its political agenda. The arguments made by Herman and Chomsky appear most relevant, as their research suggests American media are influenced by political, economic

and social pressures that result in an optimistic assessment of American political figures and ideologies and a similar negative assessment of the Communist world.

Moreover, Berry (1990) examined the *New York Times* reporting of foreign affairs and suggested that the foreign policy aims of any presidential administration have three cycles: formation, execution, and outcome. He argued that American news organizations will not criticize the president's goals during the first two steps, and the administration should not worry about manipulating media coverage during these times. He added that media criticism also will be muted during the final stage if America's policy aims are proving to be successful. However, the situation will be different if the policy is heading toward failure. He asserted that "journalists do not want a failing policy to continue" and will label a "failure as a failure".

Berry used the Bay of Pigs crisis in 1961 involving the United States and Cuba to demonstrate his hypothesis. He argued that the *New York Times* consistently followed President John Kennedy's foreign policy initiative during the formation and execution stages, but it broke with the president once it became apparent that the strategy was doomed. He said that the administration then attempted to manipulate the media so as to gain favorable coverage. He concluded that those efforts "failed as badly as the Cuban policy" (Berry, 1990: 1).

In the 1980 boycott context, the results were considered positive because more than fifty American allies sided with Carter and chose not to participate in the 1980 Games. Moreover, the policy angered the Soviet Union and reduced the size of the international stage on which it hoped to show off the value of its political and social system. Perhaps most importantly it was successful because the war between the Cold War adversaries that resulted from pursuing a boycott was nothing more than one of words. No American troops were dispatched. No missiles were used.

Notes

- 1 Plaintiffs' Motion for a Preliminary Injunction for Consolidation of the Hearing With a Trial on the Merits and for a Permanent Injunction, Affidavits and Memorandum in Support Thereof, filed April 26, 1980. The author wishes to thank William Allen, who provided the complete set of legal documents associated with the effort by a group of American athletes who sought to have the boycott declared illegal. Allen was one of several attorneys who represented the athletes. All memoranda, briefs, and legal documents cited came from the entire set of papers Mr. Allen supplied the author. On the same day the president sent his letter to the USOC he also notified the Iranian government that its diplomats in Washington were being expelled. See Robert L. Jackson and Norman Kempster, "Bitter Diplomats Close Offices, Fly to Tehran", *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1980.
- 2 Readers who review Reich's account of the vote should note that he mistakenly wrote that the vote was "1,064 for the boycott and 797 against it". The "0" and "6" should have been reversed.

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