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The 1980 Moscow Olympic Boycott: Politics and the Public

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Baron Pierre de Coubertin's dream came true in 1896 when the first modern Olympic games were held in Athens, Greece. De Coubertin's vision was to foster international relations through sport that would transcend the petty political structure of European foreign relations with a key component of participation being a complete separation of a nation's Olympic committee from that nation's government. However, despite attempts to keep the Olympics at an arm's-length from politics, the games have been used as a tool for spreading propaganda and political ideology. In the absence of armed military conflict, the Cold War polarized previously less political events, such as the Olympic Games, as the U.S. and Soviet Union fought for moral and economic superiority. This politicization came to a head when, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter threatened to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow and pressured the United States Olympic Committee (U.S.O.C.) to follow his demands. Carter's decision eliminated the line of independence between the federal government and U.S.O.C. as an organization that was fully separate from and not influenced in any way by its government's foreign policies, conscripting U.S.O.C. to fight alongside its national government. One can see the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games Boycott as a microcosm of the Cold War propaganda war between the U.S. and Soviet Union, as studying it reveals how state-private relationships, sports, and the American public were used in a proxy political war against the Soviet Union. This paper argues that ultimately, the Carter administration's decision to boycott the 1980 Olympic games was born from the politicization of the Olympics during the Cold War and brought together the state and private sectors in a never-before-seen way that irrevocably linked the nation's government, public, and Olympic committee in a way antithetical to the original intent of the Olympic spirit and movement.

Several different themes have emerged in the literature and study of the politicization of the Olympic games. The influence of U.S. and Soviet foreign policy objectives on the Olympics began in 1952 when the Soviet Union first competed and threatened American dominance at the games. As political tensions grew, the United States and Soviet Union saw the potential of the Olympic Games as a nonaffiliated international event that could be used to add legitimacy to the propaganda battles waged by the two rivals. Toby Rider argues in his article, "A Campaign of Truth: The State Department, Propaganda, and the Olympic Games, 1950–1952," that before the 1952 Olympics very little attention was paid to how athletics could be used as political tools.[1] Rider goes on to claim that when the Soviet Union joined the Olympic movement with the clear intention of using the games to spread propaganda and political messages, U.S. agents felt it was

[1] Toby C. Rider, "A Campaign of Truth: The State Department, Propaganda, and the Olympic Games, 1950–1952," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 4–27.

necessary to respond in kind despite reservations over damaging the games apolitical status.

Rider continues to argue in his book, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, that Cold War politics began to blur the line between the state and private sectors and the Olympics became a target for spreading U.S. propaganda.[2] Rider believes that the secret funding by the C.I.A. of private groups like the Free Europe Committee (FEC) and Hungarian National Sports Federation (HNSF), which actively sought to undermine Soviet power in Europe, showcases the breakdown of the barrier between the state and private sectors. John Massaro agrees with Rider's idea about the willingness of private citizens and organizations to engage with U.S. propaganda efforts in his article, "Press Box Propaganda? The Cold War and *Sports Illustrated*, 1956."[3] Massaro argues that the reporting of *Sports Illustrated* was influenced by Cold War political sentiment and some writers willingly agreed to present U.S. athletes as bastions of democracy and Soviet athletes as minions of the state. Massaro primarily looks at the language and syntax associated with articles describing Soviet athletes as cold, mechanical, and submissive to the state in contrast to the free and democratic U.S. athletes.

Anthony Moretti also examines the news coverage relating to the games in his article, "*New York Times* Coverage of the Soviet Union's Entrance into the Olympic Games."[4] Moretti contends that from 1948 to 1952 the *New York Times* wrote with an air of suspicion about the attitude and intentions of the Soviet Union at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. Moretti claims that the two main ideas the Times pushed were that the Soviet Union had political intentions that directly opposed Olympic values as well as being willing to cross any boundary to prove Soviet superiority. To support his claims Moretti uses excerpts and quotes from Times reporters who attended the 1952 Olympic games.

Other research has examined why the Olympics were chosen as a Cold War battleground. Alfred Sein makes the case in his book, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games: A History of the Power Brokers, Events, and Controversies that Shaped the Games*, that the Soviet Union joined the Olympic movement once they had decided victory at the Olympics equated to political and ideological victory for communism over capitalism.[5] Senn believes that with the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid and the Summer Olympics in Moscow an even more

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[2] Toby C. Rider, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. *Sport and Society*, University of Illinois Press, 2016.
[3] John Massaro, "Press Box Propaganda? The Cold War and *Sports Illustrated*, 1956," *The Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2003): 361–370.
[4] Anthony Moretti, "*New York Times* Coverage of the Soviet Union's Entrance into the Olympic Games," *Sports History Review*, no. 1 (2007): 55-72.
[5] Alfred Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games*, Human Kinetics, 1999.

tense political atmosphere descended on the games as both the U.S. and Soviet Union fought for ideological victories.

Elizabeth Redihan provides insight into why the Olympics were chosen as a Cold War battleground in her book, *The Olympics and the Cold War, 1948-1968: Sport as Battleground in the U.S.-Soviet Rivalry*.[6] Redihan contends that politics began to dominate the games in 1952 with the introduction of the Soviet Union. Redihand also argues the 1952 games began the propaganda wars as U.S. officials and citizens realized Olympic results equaled political and ideological victory even if the I.O.C declared no official winner. Redihan believes the 1956 Olympic Games set the stage for the real Cold War Olympic battle as the presence of the Soviet Union challenged U.S. domination.

Allen Gutmman takes Sein's argument one step further in his article, "The Cold War and the Olympics," claiming that the 1952 entry of the Soviet Union to the Olympics led to the increasing political nature of the games as both superpowers contested for ideological dominance. Allen Guttmann maintains that the Olympics were finally entrenched as a political battleground by President Carter's decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games.[7]

Jules Boykoff takes a more introspective look at how the Olympics impact individuals and societies in his book, "*Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics*," contending that the Olympics act as a battleground for nationalism and political ideology despite the International Olympic Committee's claims to the contrary.[8] Boykoff argues the I.O.C. was caught in a trap in maintaining the apolitical status of Olympics while the U.S. and Soviet Union battled over the spread of communism.

Work relating specifically to the 1980 U.S. boycott of the Moscow Games has primarily focused on the Carter administration's influence on the U.S.O.C. and the debatable success of the 1980 Olympic boycott in demonstrating Carter's resolve and U.S. strength. While the boycott did not end in a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Derick Hulme starts this conversation in his book, *The Political Olympics: Moscow, Afghanistan, and the 1980 U.S. Boycott*, wherein he argues that Carter's decision to boycott the Olympics was twofold as it both punished the Soviet Union and showed the world that the U.S. was not a pushover.[9] Hulme continues to say that a boycott was seen by the administration as a particularly effective psychological blow to Soviet pride.

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[6] Erin Elizabeth Redihan, *The Olympics and the Cold War, 1948-1968: Sport as Battleground in the U.S.-Soviet Rivalry*, McFarland & Company, 2017.
[7] Allen Guttmann, "The Cold War and the Olympics," *International Journal* 43, no. 4 (1998): 554–568.
[8] Jules Boykoff, *Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics*, Verso, 2016.
[9] Derick L. Hulme, *The Political Olympics: Moscow, Afghanistan, and the 1980 U.S. Boycott*, Praeger, 1990.

Building on Hulme, Christopher Hill argues in his book, *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta 1896-1996*, that President Carter pressured the U.S.O.C. to boycott the Olympics as a political reprisal against the Soviet Union for their Invasion of Afghanistan.[10] Hill argues that with the combined pressure of the Carter Administration, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the American public the U.S.O.C. was left with no choice but to boycott the games despite I.O.C. and U.S. athletes' protests.

Robert Edelman agrees with Hulme and Hill in his article, "Moscow 1980: Stalinism or Good, Clean Fun?" claiming that the decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games was a political stance by President Carter and while the Soviets did not pull out of Afghanistan it was an embarrassing moment for the Soviet Union.[11] Edelman also argues that the Soviets were surprised by the boycott and had never considered it a potential reprisal for the invasion of Afghanistan.

Baruch Hazan supports this theory of the boycott as an effective reaction in his book, Olympic *Sports and Propaganda Games: Moscow 1980*, contending that the boycott was an effective attack on the Soviet psyche as the Soviet Union had planned on hosting an Olympic that would showcase their glory and incredible political system as the greatest in the world.[12] Hazan does note the limited effect on foreign policy the boycott had but believes that without the serious threat of a boycott the Soviet Union may have remained unchallenged by the western world for the invasion of Afghanistan.

Others have viewed the boycott as a failed endeavor that had little effect on foreign relations, did little to change Soviet thinking, and Carter only called for a boycott because it was an election year and he did not want to appear weak. Nicholas Sarantakes upholds this viewpoint in his article, "The White House Games: The Carter Administration's Efforts to Establish an Alternate to the Olympics," maintaining that Carter decided to boycott the Olympics as a way of attacking Soviet pride while believing that the American public saw him as weak.[13] By taking a stance against the Soviet Union Sarantakes believes Carter was hoping to help his reelection chances as well as stand against Soviet incursions.

More recently Toby Rider and Kevin Witherspoon claim in their book, *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, that the

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[10] Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta 1896-1996*, Manchester University Press, 1996.

[11] Robert Edelman, "Moscow 1980: Stalinism or Good, Clean Fun?" *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, State University of New York Press, 2006.

[12] Baruch Hazan, *Olympic Sports and Propaganda: Moscow 1980*, Transaction Books, 1982.

[13] Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "The White House Games: The Carter Administration's Efforts to Establish an Alternative to the Olympics," *Diplomatic Games: Sports, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*, University Press of Kentucky, 2014.

decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games was just as much a political punishment for the invasion of Afghanistan as it was a way of defending the American way of life.[14] Rider and Witherspoon also argue that never before had the U.S. government so blatantly used sports as a political tool on the world stage.

A third branch of study has focused on the effects on the athletes who would have competed at the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the idea of a boycott as antithetical to the Olympic movement. Alison Steinbeck begins this argument in her article, "Competition, Cooperation, and Cultural Entertainment: The Olympics in International Relations," saying that while the Olympics have been used for political purposes, the role they play in cross-cultural exchange between athletes is still invaluable in international relations and boycotts are detrimental to the original intention of the games and only hurt the athletes.[15]

Charles Taliferro and Michel Le Gall agree with Steinbeck's belief about the effect of the politicization of the Olympics in their article, "The Ethics of Boycotting the Olympics," saying that a nation's decision to boycott a private event such as the Olympics is a clash of the state and private rights of the athletes who compete.[16] Taliferro and Le Gall continue to say that boycotting an event like the Olympics has little effect on political events, is an ineffective strategy in foreign policy, and punishes the athletes who train to compete at the Olympics.

Finally, Tom and Jerry Caraccioli have argued in their book, *Boycott: Stolen Dreams of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games*, that while many athletes and members of the public disapproved of the decision to boycott, the majority of Americans supported the boycott as a form of punishing the Soviet Union.[17] The Caracciolis believe this was because the U.S. was hesitant to engage in a military conflict with the Soviet Union over their invasion of Afghanistan. Instead, Carter chose to pursue a policy of applying as much political pressure as possible and boycotting the Olympics was an extension of this policy.

The politicization of the Olympic Games did not happen suddenly but had a slow development that primarily began after the Soviet Union began participating in 1952. With the entry of a communist country questions began to swirl around the amateur status of Soviet athletes. The President of the International Olympic Committee at the time, American Avery Brundage, was an aggressive defender of the amateurism officially required by the Olympic Charter. Interestingly, he refused to acknowledge claims by U.S. officials of Soviet

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[14] Toby C Rider and Kevin B Witherspoon, *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, University of Arkansas Press, 2018.
[15] Alison Steinbach, "Competition, Cooperation, and Cultural Entertainment: The Olympics in International Relations," *Harvard International Review* 37, no. 2 (2016): 35-39.
[16] Charles Taliferro and Michel Le Gall, "The Ethics of Boycotting the Olympics." *The Olympics and Philosophy*, University Press of Kentucky, 2012.
[17] Tom Caraccioli and Jerry Caraccioli, *Boycott: Stolen Dreams of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games*, New Chapter Press, 2008.

professionalism, as doing so would have meant admitting the Olympic Games had become caught up in Cold War politics. Toby Rider notes in his book, "*Cold War Game: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy*," that while Brundage was proudly anti-communist he believed that his role as President of the International Olympic Committee required him to set aside his personal beliefs in order to allow fair and equal participation for every country that acquired Olympic membership.[18] Brundage's refusal to intervene against Soviet Olympic practices would allow for the continued growth of anti-Soviet feelings in the United States over the Olympics, as many felt the Soviet Union was not only getting away with obvious cheating but was even rewarded for its Olympic successes. The Soviet Union represented its Olympic victories as evidence of an economically, morally, and politically superior society as Elizabeth Redihan maintains in in her book, "*The Olympics and the Cold War, 1948-1968: Sport as Battleground in the U.S.-Soviet Rivalry*."[19] While the Olympics officially never declared a country the winner of each game, newspapers quickly created points systems based upon medal results and would declare a winner at the game's conclusion. Both the United States and Soviet Union quickly jumped upon the potential of the Olympics as a platform for expressing their political and moral superiority based upon athletic achievement. This treatment of the games as a political tool is an example of the U.S.-Soviet political arms race that defines the Cold War and is antithetical to the intent of the Olympics as an apolitical event that is meant to celebrate human athletic ability regardless of a competitor's country of origin. The boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games plays a pivotal role in U.S. Olympic history, as it is the climax of decades of tension that finally broke when Carter publicly pressured the U.S.O.C. not to attend the games.

The tension over the 1980 Moscow Games was building before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Evidence of the growing belief in an American boycott of the 1980 games was apparent in 1978 during interviews with the U.S. Olympic Committee Executive Director F. Don Miller and Congressman Robert Drinan of Massachusetts. In Miller's interview he stresses that, while politics had and would continue to influence the Olympic Games, the U.S. should try and attend the games while ignoring Cold War politics as a mere annoyance. [20] Being the Executive Director of the U.S. Olympic Committee Miller obviously carries many of the ideals men like Brundage had of the Olympics as an apolitical event above the petty squabbles of nations and his sincere belief in amateur competition unblemished by the stain of politics. However, Miller and those who supported

[18] Rider, *Cold War Games*, 2016.
[19] Redihan, *The Olympics and the Cold War*, 2017.
[20] "Soviet Politics in 80' Olympics: What to Look for," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 8, 1978.

attending the Moscow Games were often the minority in American media and overshadowed by politicians and citizens who believed the 1980 Moscow Games were a political show for the Soviet Union. In an interview with Abby Finkenauer however, Robert Drinan takes an aggressive stance on the issue, calling a potential boycott justifiable because he believes attending the games would only validate Soviet propaganda and claims of superiority.[21] In agreement with Drinan's fears of legitimizing Soviet propaganda, Roger Williams' article, "Moscow '80: Playing for Political Points," argues that the Soviet Union would only use the Olympics as a political platform to promote communist ideology and that attendance would lend legitimacy to the games.[22] Williams does not call for a boycott, but one can see the ideology that supported the call in his rhetoric around U.S.-Soviet relations. The arguments made by both Drinan and Williams show the political sentiment that had sunk into American's perceptions of the Olympic Games and how the games would potentially be abused in Moscow even before Carter's executive order. Both of these sources frame U.S. actions towards Soviet advances and aggression in nationalistic terms, defending the American way of life against communism as a noble and admirable task, and argue for stronger repercussions against the Soviet Union.

Coming on the heels of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, President Carter announced in January a series of sanctions against the Soviet Union that included a call for the United States Olympic Committee to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. In his executive order Carter argues that not only should the U.S.O.C. not send a team to the games but that all U.S. firms should not contribute or participate in any aspect of the games.[23] Economic sanctions and political stances taken by the United States as a reaction to Soviet actions in Afghanistan were expected and predictable, but the inclusion of an Olympic boycott is a curious decision. The intended effect of the boycott was to force Soviet forces out of Afghanistan by February 20, 1980, and, if the Soviet Union did not pull out, to delegitimize the Moscow Olympics by withholding U.S athletes from competing. The idea of creating a story even larger than the 1980 Olympics itself is evident in discussions the Carter Administration had about applying pressure to the U.S.O.C. to acquiesce to Carter's demands. In a special coordination committee meeting, Lloyd Cutler, a member of the White House Council, details that increased legal pressure would be necessary to force the U.S.O.C.'s hand in boycotting the games as well as increasing calls for private

[21] Abby Finkenauer, "A U.S. Boycott of Moscow Olympics?; YES – 'There Could be a Confrontation in Moscow,'" *U.S. News and World Report*, August 28, 1978.
[22] Roger M Williams, "Moscow '80: Playing for Political Points," *Saturday Review*, September 1, 1979.
[23] United States Executive Office of the President, *President Carter Issues an Executive Order in Response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, 1980.

American firms to join in and distance themselves from any aspect of the games.[24] Echoing Carter's own executive order, Cutler presents the idea of weaponizing public support for the boycott by presenting the boycott as a patriotic act. The threat of legal action against the U.S.O.C., an organization meant to be independent of its country's government and political policies, is a dangerous challenge to the structure of the relationship between the U.S.O.C. and the United States government. A later memorandum for Carter from Cutler and Joe Onek, a legal advisor, on an upcoming meeting of the U.S.O.C. with the I.O.C. about a postponement or cancellation of the 1980 games also discusses how best to proceed with pressuring members to support the boycott and take advantage of splits among the committee members.[25] Discussions of publicity and public support for the boycott masked the overt actions taken by the U.S. government in exerting control over an independent organization to help carry out its political goals. By presenting the boycott as America taking a stand against Soviet aggression the Carter Administration created the view that the U.S.O.C. should act as an intermediate between the U.S. and Soviet Union and support President Carter's call for a boycott. Taking advantage of the divisions in the U.S.O.C. the Carter Administration also acted in such a way as to go against the intended purpose of the U.S.O.C. as an independent sporting organization that represented its country's citizens but not its government, political system, or beliefs. Autonomy and freedom from political, economic, and religious pressures are bylaws of the Olympic Charter and a requirement of all nations desiring to join and participate in the Olympics.[26] While National Olympic committees are allowed to co-operate with Government organizations, they are never allowed to undertake any actions that would jeopardize the rules and principles of the Olympic movement. The Carter Administration also took a brief look into the prospect of moving the 1980 Olympic Games away from Moscow and establishing Greece as the permeant home of the games. This relates to the pressure applied by the Carter Administration on the U.S.O.C. as, during a press briefing, Hodding Carter stood by President Carter's calls for a boycott if the Soviet Union did not withdraw from Afghanistan and expressed the continued hope that discussions over moving the games would be made by the U.S.O.C.[27] The I.O.C. never entertained the idea of moving the games from Moscow to appease U.S. officials in fear of angering the Soviet Union and being accused of showing of political favoritism towards the U.S. and discriminating against the

[24] United States National Security Council Special Coordination Committee, *Iran/Afghanistan/Pakistan Special Coordination Committee Meeting*, 1980.
[25] United States White House, *Olympic Games Boycott*, 1980.
[26] International Olympic Committee, *Olympic charter, 1980*. Lausanne: Comité International Olympique, 1980.
[27] United States Department of State, *Department Press Briefing, January 11, 1980*, 1980.

Soviet Union. Increasing pressure on the U.S.O.C. by engaging in almost meaningless discussions over moving or postponing the 1980 Olympics meant that more public support grew for the U.S.O.C. to boycott the games as the only option available to maintain U.S. dignity in the face of the invasion of Afghanistan. By embroiling the 1980 Olympics in political controversy the Carter Administration succeeded in shifting the narrative of the games away from the traditional glory attributed to the host city and country and towards the United States for taking a stand against Soviet aggression.

The role of the U.S. government in supporting Carter's call for a boycott is undeniable, as both the Senate and House voted to support the decision. John Averill's article, "Senate Supports boycott of Soviet Olympics," reports on the arguments used by U.S. Senators to support adopting a resolution that called for the boycott and urged all Americans to boycott the games in every way possible.[28] American Senators used rhetoric that displayed the idea that the Olympics were analogous to a direct competition with the Soviet State, and that success at the Olympics translated to cultural and societal superiority at home. This ideology is also evident in Paul Houston's article, "U.S. Boycott of Olympics Voted by House, 386-12," when he articulates Congressional support for a U.S. boycott that argued appearing at the games would be a sign that the U.S. supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[29] The approach by the U.S. government and Carter Administration can also be seen as an attempt to delegitimize the games as an attack on the Soviet psyche and the expectation that the 1980 Moscow Games would bring a massive amount of attention, celebration, and glory to the Soviet Union.

Most polls claimed approximately two thirds of Americans supported a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games with a poll from the Associated Press-NBC on February 3, 1980 showing 73% of Americans supported the boycott as long as the games were held in Moscow, a 24-point jump from an earlier poll in January.[30] Widespread support for the boycott can be explained by the American self-image as a bastion of freedom and democracy in the face of Soviet and communist growth pushed by politicians eager to gain favor with a population willing to support actions against the Soviet Union.

The most common argument in support of a U.S. boycott of the games argued that the Soviet Union had already been using the games as propaganda material and that U.S. attendance at the 1980 Moscow Games would only offer

[28] John H. Averill, "Senate Supports boycott of Soviet Olympics," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1980.
[29] Paul Houston, "U.S. Boycott of Olympics Voted by House, 386-12," *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1980.
[30] "Poll: Olympic Boycott Support is Growing," *Tampa Bay Times* (St. Petersburg, Florida), February 3, 1980.

further legitimacy to the Soviet regime. For example, in his article entitled, "Olympic Propaganda from the U.S.S.R.," Gerry Robichaux claims he received a letter from the U.S.S.R. embassy in Washington D.C. rebuking President Carter's call for a boycott and warning of the potential damage a U.S. backed boycott could have on the Olympic movement.[31] Robichaux's reaction to the letter is to cry foul, and he accuses the Soviet Union of already compromising the Olympic games and in fact being rewarded by the Olympic movement by cheating their way to success. An interesting viewpoint that Robichaux expounds upon is the idea that the U.S. Olympic team is sent by Americans, meaning people, not by America, the country/government. Robichaux continues that if the will of the people is to not send a team that year and boycott the games then there can be no other option. A separate interview with Dr. Charles Blandford, a veritable legend in the U.S. track and field movement, supports Robichaux's view. Dr. Blandford believes the Olympic games have always been politicized as evident by the creation of the U.S.O.C. by an act of Congress, and that a boycott was simply the logical way to counter Soviet aggression and damage their pride in hosting the Olympics. Dr. Blanford laments the effect a boycott would have on the athletes but believes that even while the U.S.O.C. and I.O.C. are well intentioned they cannot make the necessary decisions to stand up to the Soviet Union. A letter sent to the Herald Statesmen in Yonkers, New York entitled, "Boycott the Olympics," seconds Dr. Blandford's view that, while a boycott has the unfortunate effect of preventing American athletes from competing, it was the only reasonable action to take given the circumstances.[32] The letter also sides with the majority that felt the Olympics had already become political and places the blame squarely on the Soviet Union. A series of letters written to the Detroit Free Press in a section titled, "A U.S. Boycott is a Legitimate Weapon," showcase that even average Americans felt there was a responsibility for the United States not to attend the 1980 Olympics for fear that otherwise the United States would lose face with the rest of the world.[33] The letters argue that if the United States truly stood for freedom and democracy, then they must stand against communist imperialism regardless of the effects it has on American athletes or the Olympic movement. Another article entitled, "Principle is No Game," supported this framing of the issue, arguing that the Soviet Union was already using the Olympics as a political stage and that the U.S. needed to show consistency with its foreign policy against the Soviet Union.[34] The issue at the heart of many of the supporters of the boycott was that there seemed to be no conceivable way to participate at the 1980

[31] Gerry Robichaux, "Olympic Propaganda from the U.S.S.R.," *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), April 12, 1980.
[32] "Boycott the Olympics," *Herald Statesman* (Yonkers, New York), January 31, 1980.
[33] "A U.S. Boycott is a Legitimate Weapon," *Detroit Free Press*, January 21, 1980.
[34] "Principle is no Game," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1980.

Moscow Games without sending the signal that the United States supported the Soviet regime and its invasion of Afghanistan. Many also stated their belief in the boycott as a statement of commitment to American principles and values but do not seem to understand that the direct interference of the U.S. government into the matters of the U.S.O.C. does pose a challenge to the principles of the Olympics. It poses the question of whether stopping Soviet aggression in Afghanistan is more important than allowing for free and independent international athletic competition? Boycott supporters felt that it was impossible to separate the political identities of competing American and Soviet athletes and that Olympic success was a reflection of a superior society and culture. This view of Olympic success as comparable to the success of the nation is antithetical to the Olympic movement, which was started as a way to promote friendly athletic competition without the involvement of politics or a greater political agenda. This shift in the Olympic narrative demonstrates that the Cold War had an effect on the American perception of the Olympics as the political struggle was framed as a battle for cultural survival.

Supporters of the boycott used other arguments alongside the need to take a stand against Soviet imperialism when defending Carter's decision. Despite President Carter articulating that the U.S. would not boycott the games on the condition that the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan by February 20, 1980, even supporters of the boycott doubted it would change the Soviet's minds. However, supporters of the boycott did feel it would strike a strong psychological blow to the Soviet Union's propaganda machine and damage the global perception of the Moscow Games. In his article entitled, "Olympics Boycott will Hurt," Jack Anderson claims that without the United States competing at the 1980 Moscow Olympics the Soviet Union will be denied the prestige, propaganda opportunity, and legitimacy that U.S. participation would have brought.[35] Anderson even states his belief that merely choosing Moscow as the host city for the Olympics brings an unfortunate legitimacy to the Soviet regime. Anderson believes that changing the narrative around the games from the great success of the Soviets to the lack of participation by the Americans is a great detriment to Soviet propaganda efforts. Another source from *The Dispatch* in Moline, Illinois titled, "Russians Intertwine Olympics and Politics," continues the argument that a boycott would effectively cripple Soviet propaganda efforts and strike a blow to Soviet pride.[36] This article also presents the view that, while a boycott was unlikely to convince the Soviet Union to leave Afghanistan, the threat of a boycott was serious enough to make the Soviet Union rethink future aggressive acts. Of a similar vein, a joint article from Bob Dyer and Maury White entitled, "Two Sides

[35] Jack Anderson, "Olympics Boycott will Hurt," *Press and Sun Bulletin* (Binghamton, New York), February 16, 1980.
[36] "Russians Intertwine Olympics and Politics," *The Dispatch* (Moline, Illinois), January 27, 1980.

to the Olympic Boycott," exposes both the pros and cons of boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Dyer takes the side that boycotting the games would eliminate much of the prestige the Soviet Union had taken in their selection as an Olympic host.[37] Dyer is also of the mind that while a boycott of the games would have a limited effect as a foreign policy measure, the psychological damage it would incur by changing the game's narrative from Soviet success to Soviet imperialism would be worth it.

Supporters of the boycott saw it as an effective psychological blow against the Soviet Union as they believed that what mattered most to the Soviet Union was their image and opportunities to flout a superior society. Also evident is a sense of moral superiority among Americans who believe American culture and society is superior to Soviet culture and society. These articles also display a belief that Olympic success was tantamount to proving the superiority of the competing athlete's country, an idea encouraged by both the United States and Soviet Union. By supporting a boycott with the understanding that, while likely an ineffective foreign policy move, it would deal a blow to Soviet pride the authors showcase the view that the Olympics were a political affair and gave political prestige to host countries and winning athletes. Again, in the minds of many Americans the Olympics were a global stage where the victor proved the superiority of their economic and political system rather than an apolitical and friendly sports competition. In examining the way Cold War feelings affected Americans' views on the Olympics it becomes clear that most Americans felt that they were participating in a contest with the Soviet Union for cultural superiority.

Not all Americans supported the boycott. Some believed a boycott was unfair to U.S. athletes while others saw it as a political move made by President Carter. However, even in articles against the U.S. boycott still viewed the Olympics through the lens of a Cold War propaganda battle. In Maury White's half of the joint article, "Two Sides to the Olympic Boycott," he laments the politicization of the Olympic Games citing his belief that by boycotting the games the U.S. government was overreaching itself and the American public supporting the boycott had confused politics with patriotism over the issue.[38] White's concern lies in his belief that the government should either be completely involved in something or not at all. A half-way balance is impractical and impossible, and by inserting itself in the Olympic movement the U.S. risked destroying the foundation of international sports. While noting that his beliefs may be seen as naive, White claims that international sports should not be a political channel for the U.S. government and argues that, even if the Soviet Union may try and use the games for more overt political propaganda purposes,

[37] Bob Dyer and Maury White, "Two Sides to the Olympic Boycott," *Des Moines Register*, January 27, 1980.
[38] Dyer and White, "Two Sides," 1980.

all nations should take great pride in hosting the Olympics and has no issue with a country attempting to present itself as advanced and cultural. A minority of Americans did oppose the boycott as they felt direct government involvement in international sports would prove detrimental to free and apolitical international events. This minority also shared the view that Americans had in general become too politicized by the Cold War and were too eager to showcase their patriotism through misguided and ill-advised acts such as the 1980 boycott.

Others who opposed the boycott did so on political grounds, believing Carter was pushing for a boycott because 1980 was an election year and was worried his reputation for being soft on the Soviet Union would spoil his chances at reelection. This view can be seen in Harry Edward's article, "'Coach Carter Fumbles in Olympics Boycott," where he calls out Carter's boycott as unprepared for the realities of what an Olympic boycott entails and for jeopardizing the U.S.O.C. and international sporting events.[39] Calling the boycott "bush-league", Edward does not hide his disdain for Carter's call for a boycott and showcases his view that Cold War politics and feelings were clouding the minds that were supporting him. This view of an over-politicized American public displays the long-term effects of Cold War politics and feelings by rapidly transforming any issue relating to the Soviet Union or communism as a platform to showcase an individual's patriotism. Russ Worman's article, "Now Batting for Carter… The Olympics," also represents the view that Carter's boycott was a political move designed to make Carter and the U.S. look as if they were opposing the Soviet Union but would ultimately lead to more divisiveness and damage to international sports competitions.[40] Worman presents a two-fold argument that an overzealous administration and American public were potentially making a grave mistake by boycotting the Moscow Games and threatening the freedom presently enjoyed by the U.S.O.C. By potentially removing the barriers between the U.S. government and its international sporting bodies, Worman feared that a system similar to the Soviet Olympic machine could be formed where the line between the state and its athletes became blurred. Defense of independent American athletes who had trained for the 1980 Olympics and were now being robbed of the opportunity to represent themselves and their country at a free and fair sporting event bothered some Americans who felt the boycott was potentially an un-American move by President Carter.

The victory of the U.S. Men's Hockey Team in the Miracle on Ice at the 1980 Winter Olympics and the Soviet Union's Revenge boycott at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics have garnered more attention and renown than the 1980 U.S.

[39] Harry Edwards, "'Coach' Carter Fumbles in Olympics Boycott," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1980.
[40] Russ Worman, "Now batting for Carter… the Olympics," *Press and Sun Bulletin* (Binghamton, New York), January 27, 1980.

boycott because of the view of those events as undeniably American victories against the Soviet Union. Even in the immediate aftermath of Carter's announcement of the 1980 boycott fears arose that a revenge boycott was a possible form of Soviet retaliation. Kevin Klose notes in his article, "Olympics Boycott Idea Angers Soviets: Moscow Reportedly Hints at Similar Move Aimed at Games in L.A.," wherein he worries what a potential future of escalating boycotts and other political messages could mean to the future of the Olympic movement.[41] Klose also states his fear that supporters of the boycott who argue a boycott is necessary to stand up for American principles may in fact be compromising the principles around free and independent international sports by supporting governmental control over the U.S.O.C. Fortunately for Klose, fears over escalating Olympic tensions were misplaced. Even though the Soviets and other eastern bloc countries did boycott the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics both the U.S. and Soviet Union had representatives at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. But Klose's argument over what principles Americans define themselves by does raise the questions of how much or whether the U.S. government should have control over the U.S.O.C. and, if so, how much?

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the subsequent rise of modern-day Russia has led to changes in the American perception of the Olympic games. Christopher Hill notes in his book, *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta 1896-1996*, that while the Olympics are still a major global event there is a more relaxed political tension between the United States, Russia, and now China.[42] Hill also discussed the rise of the Olympic Games as a commercial event and the role that has played in shifting parts of the narrative surrounding the event. It is possible that Russia did learn from the 1980 U.S. boycott, waiting until after hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi to annex Crimea. But while the events around the Olympics continue to shift and change, the role of politics and their influence on the games continues to this day.

In conclusion, while the Olympic Games had become politicalized during the Cold War the Carter Administration's decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games was antithetical to the original intent of the Olympic movement and was a result of the growing consensus that Olympic success was related to a nation's cultural, political, and economic success. As can be seen in documents from the Carter Administration there was a concentrated effort to pressure the U.S.O.C. to commit to a boycott even to the point of legal action against the organization. The Carter Administration was largely supported in this endeavor, because the boycott was viewed by the American public as a moral stand against the Soviet invasion

[41] Kevin Klose, "Olympics Boycott Idea Angers Soviets: Moscow Reportedly Hints at Similar Move Aimed at Games in L.A," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1980.
[42] Hill, *Olympic Politics*, 1996.

of Afghanistan and would damage Soviet pride, delegitimize the games, and limit the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda. Articles written to support the boycott claimed the Soviet Union had inserted politics into the games and needed to be shown that Americans would not stand for a Soviet-dominated world. Nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric was commonly used to frame the issue as a battle for cultural survival and that while unfortunate for the athletes a boycott was a necessity in order to combat Soviet aggression. Those who opposed the boycott felt it was unfair to American athletes and could have had major ramifications on the ability to host and participate in international sporting competitions. Others felt that a boycott was misplaced patriotism and an ill-advised attempt by the U.S. government to exert control over its Olympic representative. What can be seen from both sides is that the American public viewed the boycott through Cold War tinted glasses that framed the conflict as an opportunity to showcase one's patriotism and commitment to American values. The Olympics may never be completely free of political debates and it may be impossible to differentiate athletes from their country's politics and government. With the 2022 Winter Olympics set to be held in Beijing there have already been discussions of a possible U.S. boycott by athletes, politicians, and members of the press. The Biden administration has said with the games still a year away no official decision about attendance has been made, but it is likely that as the games approach a statement will be made. However, the original intent of the movement was to provide a space for free and fair international competition that could serve as a break from the political issues of the day. The decision by President Carter to order a boycott of the games is then a direct contradiction to the intent of the Olympic Games and displays the fragility of the games and their special role in global society as an international competitive event.

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