

Eastern Europe constitutes a vast, diverse and dynamic geopolitical landscape. During the 20th Century, the region experienced unprecedented shifts in political, ideological and geographic terms, most notably in the fall of Communism in the post-1989 era. These periods of key political change were played out not only in key political arguments and armed conflicts, but also upon the Olympic stage and in multiple other sporting arenas. This case study considers how the Olympic stage has been utilised as a key arena for the expression of competing dominant political ideologies in modern history.

Key moments in Eastern European Olympic sporting history are now recalled in their order of chronology, beginning with the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, the boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games by Western European nations, and the assassination of Israeli athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. The case study concludes with consideration of the recent armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Georgia over the conflicted region of South Ossetia, all played out against a backdrop of a successful bid to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.



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SPORT, THE EASTERN BLOC AND DOPING

Sport has often been referenced as a site of ideological and political conflict, where to be victorious is to also showcase the dominance of one political ideology over another. Never was this truer than in the Cold War period where dominant democratic and communistic principles between East and West vied for dominance on a sporting stage. The Olympic Games, as the world's largest sporting competition was, of course, a historic site for political and ideological battles of this kind.

The need to secure Olympic Gold medals and to thus showcase national power formed the basis of a state-led doping strategy by Eastern bloc nations, where performance enhancing substances were administered to athletes in large doses to produce more medal winners.

East German coach Ekkart Arbeit took a lead role in the systematic doping programs of East German sports during the 1970's and 1980's. Arbeit was one of many sports coaches who were prosecuted for their role in administering extensive doses of anabolic steroids to East German athletes. Heidi Krueger, an athlete coached by Arbeit, accused him of administering such a heavy programme of steroids to her that she was forced to undergo a sex-change operation to become a man. Heidi Krueger now lives as Andreas Krueger. Whilst extreme, this example serves as a representation of the way in which the lives and health of many Eastern bloc athletes were compromised in the pursuit for Olympic Gold.

OLYMPIC BOYCOTTS

THE WESTERN BOYCOTT OF THE 1956 MELBOURNE OLYMPICS

The Melbourne Games were fraught with political ill will. In July 1956, Egypt seized control of the Suez Canal from Britain and France; Britain and France retaliated in October by invading Egypt to regain control of the area. This sparked a full-blown international crisis a month ahead of the Games. Then, less than three weeks before the Opening Ceremony, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in a bid to crush a Hungarian uprising against the Communist regime. In protest of this invasion of Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland all boycotted the Games.



THE WESTERN BOYCOTT OF THE MOSCOW 1980 OLYMPIC GAMES

To understand the 61-nation boycott of The Moscow Olympic Games in 1980, one must first understand the history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that caused the boycott itself.

Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

In 1979, the USSR seized control of the Afghan capital, Kabul. Over 100,000 Soviet soldiers were involved in the invasion.

Whilst Babrak Karmal was quickly instated as a leader, the Soviets were met with vociferous resistance, most notably from the Afghani resistance fighters, the Mujahidin. The Mujahidin viewed Soviet control of their country as a defilement of Islam, which caused their proclamation of a jihad, or holy war.

The invasion was largely viewed as a failure, owing partly to the mountainous nature of the country; a difficulty also currently faced by the coalition of troops currently engaged in the fight against terrorism in the region. Occupying forces nevertheless see Afghanistan as a territory that offers potential strategic benefits such as an increased influence in Asia.

The invasion and occupation lasted until eventual withdrawal in 1979. Fighting against the Soviets was facilitated greatly by US who provided weapons and millions of dollars of funding to the Mujahidin. The UN also condemned the actions and provided a great deal of diplomatic pressure to hasten a withdrawal. Ironically, one of the current recipients of US weapons and financial support is often cited to be Osama Bin Laden.

The effect on the Afghani population was brutal; Soviet forces targeted Afghani civilians who they viewed as housing Mujahidin forces, bombing and destroying entire villages at a time. Crops, irrigation, communication and other general infrastructural damages added

to the millions of deaths experienced by the Afghani population. Refugee camps in Pakistan quickly became overcrowded and the global response was one of condemnation.

At the point of eventual withdrawal in 1989 the bloody conflict had claimed the lives of 15,000 Soviet soldiers, countless Afghani's and accounted for millions of dollars. No doubt part of the terrifying legacy of the Soviet invasion has been a jihad and a strengthening of terrorist-led activity that can be witnessed today ; unsurprising, perhaps, for a generation of Afghani's that had known little more than violence and atrocities at the hands of foreign occupying forces.

The great investments but subsequent failure of this operation is largely blamed as a significant contributory cause to the eventual downfall and dissolution of the Soviet Empire post-1989.

Boycotting the 1980 Games

A direct consequence of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan within the world of sport was the widespread boycott of 61 countries of The 1980 Moscow Games. THE UK participated in the boycott. Neville Trotter, British Conservative MP: *"Another venue should be found," he said, "and if necessary the games should be postponed for a year. This is the one lever we have to show outrage at this naked aggression by Russia. We should do all we can to reduce the Moscow Olympics to a shambles."*



The US also adopted a decisive stance in their decision to boycott, with the US House of Representatives voting decisively 386-12 in favour of this motion. US President Jimmy Carter stated that: "I have 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."

Of course, the Olympic Movement takes an official stance that the Games are not, and should not be, political, so would not have agreed to any demands, such as Trotter's, for the Games to be moved to an alternative host nation.

Saudi Arabia was first to announce their boycott of the Games, in protest over Soviet aggression on Islamic land. Only 81 countries were to eventually participate in the Games. In turn, the Soviet Union, in conjunction with 14 other Eastern Bloc partners, refused to compete in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics four years later, citing concerns over the safety of Soviet athletes.

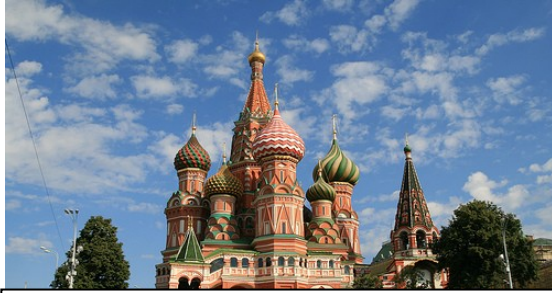


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Financial Ramifications of the Moscow Boycott

The Olympic Games are now heavily commercialised and by 1980, broadcasting rights had already proved a significant form of income. In 1980, NBC had paid \$85m for the rights to broadcast 152.5 hours of the Games across the US. The network had sold 98% of advertising space by the time the boycott was announced (at a rate of \$165,000 a minute, approximately \$450,000 in current day terms when inflation is taken into account). NBC had forecast a profit of \$25m and was therefore clearly damaged financially by the American boycott. Scholars interested in event management and media and communications issues might benefit from further research of the impact of the boycott on the private and public sector of each boycotting nation.

SOCHI 2014

Perhaps the most recent and significant example of political and ideological forces affecting sport can be witnessed in the 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russian forces, following the recent victory of the Russian Federation in the securing of the rights to host the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi.

BACKGROUND TO THE SOCHI 2014 BID

Three cities (Salzburg, Sochi and PyeongChang) submitted a Candidature File to the IOC in January 2007, in a bid to become the official Host City of the XXII Winter Olympic Games. Despite initially trailing in the first round of the selection process to PyeongChang (Republic of Korea), the Russian Federation finally emerged victorious as the official Host City of the 2014 XXII Winter Olympic Games, securing 51 votes against PyeongChang's 47 in the second and final round of voting. Russian President Vladimir Putin personally lobbied members of the IOC during the selection process that culminated with the Games coming to Russia for the first and only time since Russia hosted the US-boycotted 1980 Moscow Summer Games as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Sochi, a favoured location of Vladimir Putin and Russia's financial elite, is a city of nearly 400,000 and is located between the Black Sea and Caucasus Mountains in southern Russia. Located in the heart of the 'Russian Riviera', Sochi is also notably close to the separatist Abkhazia region that is part of the military conflict that began in 2008 over Georgia's breakaway South Ossetia province, raising concerns about the political volatility of the area in relation to its ability to stage the Games.

The official announcement of Sochi's win surprised many, in the context of strong bids from Austria and South Korea. The win was celebrated by over 30,000 Russians with a

massive firework demonstration accompanying a night of celebration that did not end until dawn.

STRUCTURE OF THE SOCHI BID

The vision and legacy plan of Sochi 2014 was to unite the resources of the city of Sochi, the Krasnodar region and the Russian nation. Undoubtedly, the Sochi 2014 Games offer an opportunity to open a new gateway for winter sport in Russia, with facilitation of the development of a sustainable, inclusive, environmentally responsible sports and resort infrastructure. The host city design features mountain venues that are situated only 49 km away from the coast and are located in the mountain region of Krasnaya Polyana 'Red Meadow'). Notably, the Games have led to the creation of Russia's first international-quality training and competition facilities for Alpine skiing, sliding sports and ski jumping.

The Olympic-related infrastructure will be developed around two 'venue clusters' about 30 miles apart. Coastal venues will be constructed about two miles from the Olympic Village, with three of the venues located next to it. According to initial government plans, Sochi's privately funded 15-lift Roza Khutor ski area will host all Alpine events. The Gazprom Resort on Sochi's Psekhako Ridge will host all cross-country skiing events. Figure skating and hockey will be conducted in arenas close to the Black Sea.

PRIVATE & PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN SOCHI 2014



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It has been reported that public and private investment in Sochi's Olympic infrastructure is likely to reach \$20 billion. Potential returns on this investment appear significant, with Sochi now in a competitive position to expand its capabilities as a summer tourist location to also encompass the potentially lucrative winter and business tourism markets. Town officials have predicted annual tourism to increase from 4million to 6million visitors in the run-up to the Games. The legacy of the Games includes the improvement of water, sewage and other utility services for local residents.

PROTESTS AGAINST THE GAMES

Whilst government reports indicate public support running at 84% in favour of the Games, concerns from environmental agencies such as Greenpeace have been raised regarding the commercialisation of one of Russia's most spectacular natural regions. However, positive views are also reported, with local residents voicing their approval of the new sewage system and centralised water system installed in the region as a result of the cities' Host City status.

Critically, concerns over ongoing political conflicts in the region exist; Sochi is located next to some of the region's most politically troubled areas, namely, Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Whilst government agencies of these regions issued statements of support at the time of the bid, a Russian invasion of Georgia followed shortly after, significantly altering political relations between the regions.

It remains to be seen whether this heightened political volatility will detrimentally affect Olympic development and regeneration in the Sochi area, specifically regarding the threat of terrorist activity, given the heightened political tensions that now exist between the Russian Federation and Georgia.

THE POLITICAL CONFLICT

South Ossetia has been in conflict with the state of Georgia since just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. The dispute is essentially based on South Ossetia's wish for independence from the state of Georgia. The Russian Federation supports South Ossetia's call for independence, recognising it as an independent state (a stance condemned by the UN).

Tensions escalated significantly in 2008 when Mikheil Saakashvili was elected Georgian president in 2004, gaining many votes on his promise to re-unite the country. A series of clashes between Georgian and South

Ossetian's quickly followed, culminating in a Georgian aerial bombardment and ground attack on South Ossetia on 7 August, 2008. Occupation of the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali by Georgian forces quickly followed. Russia responded immediately by sending thousands of troops into the South Ossetia region and by launching bombing raids both over the contested province and within other areas of Georgia.

Many analysts warned that the conflict might exert a significant and detrimental affect on Russia's chances of winning the right to stage the Games, but it can be observed that the conflict did not, in fact, provide a hurdle to Russia's victory in acquiring the title of host city of the 2014 Games.

FIND OUT MORE

Sochi Olympic website

www.sochi2014.org

Olympics website:

www.olympic.org

**National Geographic website: Eastern Europe
Facts & Figures**

**National Geographic website: Georgia
Country Facts**

http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_georgia_cntry.html

CREDITS

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