

SPOTLIGHTING THE OLYMPICS

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News was announced late last week that China will host the 2008 Olympic Games. The promulgation emanated from Moscow, site of the world's greatest argument against the decision. What does Moscow have to do with it? In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan even though they knew they had the 1980 Olympics coming up in Moscow, and that the United States, and others, might boycott the games because of the invasion.

There are some other bad models available. Adolf Hitler's Germany, for example, hosted the 1936 Olympics. Some pundits hoped that the attendant publicity would shine the spotlight on the abuses of Hitler's Nazi hellhole. Instead, Hitler used the spotlight to tell all the world how peachy things were.

Consider now the Chinese Olympics of 2008. Is it good idea or a bummer? Begin with the idea that China isn't just another country. As the world is now configured China is the only nation that in the intermediate or long term can challenge America as the world's leading power, and in its corollary complex role as the purveyor of liberty.

China is the world's most populous nation -- more than a billion people. It is arming heavily, with an emphasis on nuclear weaponry. It exports arms and technology to rogue anti-American states. It has an expansionist goal in mind -- the incorporation of Taiwan into "one China," whether the Taiwanese like it or not. It is defiantly not a democratic nation and eschews the Western concept of human rights, evidenced now by its crackdown on the Falun Gong religious order, and on Christians. It is a nation that scares the hell out of its neighbors: Japan, Russia, India, Korea and even dear old Vietnam.

Accordingly, it deserves special thought and special treatment.

The folks who say the 2008 Beijing Olympics are a good idea say it will help make the Chinese Communist government behave itself better. There would be some logic to that view, except the Chinese have been lobbying for these games for more than a decade and it hasn't seemed to modify their behavior yet.

The pro-Beijing advocates also note that the Chinese have long felt that they are underestimated and unappreciated by the world community. Perhaps this recognition can take part of the big chip off their big shoulder. Surely, the public reactions in China were rhapsodic, and understandably so.

Moreover, say the advocates, the Olympics are about athletics, and politics should be kept out of the picture. The idea of competition among great young athletes from around the world is indeed a thrilling one. I happen to love the Olympic Games, although the smarmy and saccharine television coverage of the games by NBC has been chipping away at that affection.

But television plays another role. As the Olympics have achieved such prominent global video coverage in recent decades, they cannot and should not be kept away from the full range of human affairs, i.e. politics.

Accordingly, those who opposed the decision said the games should go to Beijing as a reward only when their global and internal policies showed evidence of improvement. The decision had the effect of publicly rewarding bad behavior.

For the record, I don't think it was a wise choice. But it is now a fact. What can we do about it, or with it? Can the Beijing Games be used to help Americans, Chinese and humanity?

All leverage has not been lost. After all, it was after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan that the United States pulled out of the Moscow games.

President Jimmy Carter took much heat for that decision, but it was proper and courageous one. Now, the United States should make it clear that if the Chinese get dangerous with Taiwan, we will boycott the Beijing Games, and work to see to it that others join the boycott. That's the ultimate club in the closet, on a cosmic issue.

But can the upcoming Beijing Games be used on sub-cosmic issues? With the global expansion of media, the world spotlight is more intense than ever. It can sometimes influence the actions of nations. That's sometimes called the "CNN effect."

Now, more so than ever, the Chinese should be held publicly accountable for human rights violations and geo-political mischief making. As human rights abuses continue, and they almost surely will, the world should be reminded that the abusers are the hosts of the games. When the Chinese send arms to dangerous nations, the world should be reminded that our 2008 hosts are the perpetrators. Conversely, if the Chinese move toward more responsible positions, they ought to be applauded, publicly.

Perhaps some good can come from a bad decision.

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