

Beijing Olympics mired in geopolitical tension

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The 2022 Winter Olympics open in Beijing tomorrow amid acute geopolitical tensions, most sharply expressed in Washington's aggressive threats against Moscow over Ukraine, and surging cases of COVID-19 and deaths around the world.

The Biden administration sought to transform the Olympics into a vehicle for its cynical "human rights" campaign against China. On December 6, it declared a diplomatic boycott of the Games—that is, by top US officials and political representatives, not American competitors—and called on its allies to follow suit.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki cited the "ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang" as the reason for the boycott. The allegation that the Chinese government is engaged in "genocide" in Xinjiang is a patent lie that underscores the utterly hypocritical character of Washington's selective use of "human rights," not just in relation to China but other countries targeted by the US.

The "human rights" campaign against China and also Russia is just part of the US propaganda offensive as it aggressively prepares for war against what it regards as the two chief threats to its economic and strategic interests. The Biden administration has no more concern for the democratic rights of the Chinese and Russian workers than it does for those of the working class anywhere else in the world, including in the United States where police violence and openly fascist tendencies are on the rise.

Washington's naked aggression has only served to drive Russia and China closer together, despite previous differences and disputes. Beijing has publicly signalled its support for Moscow in its confrontation with the US, declaring that Russia has legitimate security concerns over the eastward extension of the NATO military alliance.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is demonstrating Moscow's support for the Beijing Olympics by attending the event and holding in-person talks tomorrow with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Speaking to Russian

Olympians last month, Putin declared that Russia and its "Chinese friends" shared a common approach to international sport. "Together we oppose the politicisation of sport and demonstrative boycotts," he said.

Washington's diplomatic boycott appears to have largely fallen flat. A small number of close US allies are taking the same stance, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania and the UK. Others have attempted to dodge the issue by avoiding announcing a boycott, but either sending lower-level dignitaries or declaring, like New Zealand, the Netherlands and Sweden, that no official party will attend for unstated reasons related to the COVID pandemic.

The pandemic itself has been profoundly politicised, with mounting demands emanating from Washington in particular that China abandon its zero COVID policy—a combination of public health measures that has successfully suppressed virus outbreaks and kept deaths to a minimum. Not only does China's policy expose the murderous "let it rip" policy of herd immunity adopted by most governments around the world, including the US, but it has led to fears in corporate circles that China's public health restrictions will exacerbate global supply chain breakdowns.

The Western media has treated in a hostile manner the lengths to which the Chinese government has gone to protect Olympic teams of athletes and officials, as well as the Chinese population from infection. Article after article either openly or by implication maligns the testing regime and isolation restrictions associated with the "Olympic bubble" as bureaucratic and officious, suggesting they are unnecessary.

A lengthy article published yesterday in Japan's *Nikkei Asia* was entitled: "On thin ice: Winter Olympics reveal cracks in China's zero-COVID policy—with Omicron's arrival, costs of zero-tolerance measures may outweigh benefits." The vast bulk is not about the Olympics and what it reveals, but rather reiterates the impact of the zero COVID policy on the Chinese population in the most recent outbreaks in cities such as Xi'an and Tianjin.

Such articles reveal staggering indifference to the lives and health of populations around the world, where hundreds of millions have been infected and millions have died. Japan, for instance, has had over 2.8 million infections and nearly 19,000 deaths. In China, the infections and deaths have been a fraction of other countries. Most took place in the first months of the outbreak, and the restrictions and lockdowns have overwhelming public support. Moreover, the continuing outbreaks have all resulted from foreign sources—that is, the failure of governments globally to adopt a coordinated strategy of elimination.

The *Nikkei Asia* article is compelled to acknowledge that “unlike the Tokyo Summer Olympics—which in March 2020, four months before the scheduled opening ceremony—were postponed for a year, there has been little doubt that Beijing 2022 will take place on schedule.”

It did not explain that the inadequate measures put in place by the Japanese government to suppress the virus resulted in widespread public opposition to the Games as a result of the crisis in the country’s health system.

The supposed “crack” in the system is the emergence of Omicron cases in Beijing. After elaborating the extensive testing and other public health measures in the affected districts, the article concludes by referring to a Chinese financial expert who thinks that “Omicron will be no match for the central government” and suggests it will not lock down Beijing in the midst of the Olympics. There is more than a hint that the writer is hoping that Omicron will run out of control in Beijing and China.

A particularly vile speech by multi-billionaire entrepreneur George Soros, delivered to the right-wing Hoover Institute in the United States on January 31, goes one step further. In a foul reactionary rant, he expresses the hope that the highly-infectious Omicron strain will overwhelm the zero COVID policy and “be Xi Jinping’s undoing.”

Soros claims, without a shred of evidence, that Omicron has already spread “to an increasing number of cities” and “is no longer under control,” blaming this on what he calls “Xi Jinping’s guilty secret”—the fact that Chinese vaccines are likely to be ineffective against Omicron. China is developing its own mRNA vaccine akin to Pfizer and Moderna.

The real “guilty secret” of governments around the world is that vaccines by themselves will not halt the spread of COVID-19. That requires the type of elimination measures in place in China to be extended internationally. Moreover, Soros makes no reference to

the deadly consequences of the spread of COVID in China with its population 1.4 billion.

Significantly, the attitude of Olympic athletes and sports officials to China’s zero COVID policy is starkly at odds to that of Soros and others. Despite the fact that every athlete and official has to undergo rigorous testing, which has already identified more than 200 positive cases, they are widely supportive of the measures designed to protect their health.

Buried in the *Nikkei Asia* article are the comments of Kenichi Sugio, head coach of Japanese speedskater Shogo Miyata, who thinks that the Olympic “bubble” is a good idea. “The restrictions are unavoidable,” he said. “If they enable the Olympics to be held, we can’t be too stressed about them... it’s about protecting yourself.”

A string of similar comments was reported in an Australian Broadcasting Corporation article entitled “Life inside Beijing’s Winter Olympics bubble.” Olympian Brit Cox, for example, said: “I actually think the bubble is really excellent. I feel really safe... the fact that every single person inside the bubble is doing a PCR test every day gives me a lot of peace of mind...”

“I think the Chinese and the Olympic Committee have done an incredible job at making sure that we’re all safe and healthy both for the local community here and China and for the athletes and everybody here for the Games.”

For decades, the Olympics Games have increasingly become the occasion for an outpouring of nationalism and the making of corporate profit. Under the current circumstances, including the heightened danger of war, that is taking on an ever-more reactionary character.



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