

Olympics open under clouds of war

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The opening ceremonies of the 2022 Winter Olympics were staged on Friday in Beijing. Two thousand nine hundred athletes have gathered from 91 countries and regions throughout the world to compete in the games.

The global pageantry of the Olympics, its celebration of extraordinary athletic prowess realized through competition and solidarity, retains the ability to move viewers throughout the world. There is breathtaking gracefulness to figure skating and an electric intensity to the slalom. One senses, albeit onesidedly, the truth in *Hamlet's* lines describing humanity “infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable.”

Nationalism has always distorted this humane core to the games, fragmenting the universality of competition behind the bitter rivalries of nation-states. Imperialist war and great power rivalry disfigure the Olympics, turning sports into a form of politics by other means. Inordinate sums of money chasing after yet greater profit—advertising, endorsement contracts—flood the games, squeezing the humanity, sometimes even the life, from the athletes.

The distortion has seldom, if ever, been as pronounced as it is now. The 2022 Winter Olympics in China are being staged in a world wracked by disease and poised on the edge of global conflict. There is an air of unreality within the Olympic bubble, as just outside the safety of its bounds, Washington churns out propaganda and lies to justify war with Russia over Ukraine and to attack China's Zero-COVID public health measures as authoritarian, even fascist.

Athletes from around the globe depart from countries in the grip of mass death to the one country on the planet where the virus has been effectively eliminated. Over 900,000 Americans have died of COVID in less than two years, according to official numbers, while in China, a nation with four times the population, the death toll is less than five thousand.

Global capitalism, with the United States at its core, is intransigently unwilling to take the necessary measures to save human lives. Millions have died of a virus whose spread was entirely preventable. The pandemic has fundamentally destabilized social relations and in the developing struggles of the working class, whose very lives are at stake, the ruling elite glimpse the specter of revolution.

It is the crisis of capitalism, the need to suppress unrest and to secure reliable sources of profit, that has driven Washington

war-mad. Over the past month, the United States, with NATO in tow, has piled high a mountain of baseless allegations and lies all directed toward provoking a war with Russia over Ukraine, a war that if it erupted would inevitably spill past borders and ignite a global conflagration. Without pausing for breath, Washington spews a stream of bile at China, an unending series of slanders, each more unhinged than the last. China is termed “fascist,” a “genocidal regime,” repressive to its people and a coldblooded killer of puppies and hamsters.

The perilous geopolitical stakes surrounding the Olympics found expression in the summit held before its opening ceremonies. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin met to grapple with the mutual threat they face from US imperialism.

They issued a lengthy joint statement which declared “Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions.” They expressed a joint intent “to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, [and] oppose color revolutions.” These declarations pointedly target the war machinations of Washington and NATO.

The statement continued, we “oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideologized Cold War approaches.” Putin affirmed Russia's support for the one-China principle, declared that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and expressed opposition to all forms of Taiwanese independence. Most significantly Putin and Xi concluded a deal for the sale of Russian oil and gas to China worth an estimated \$117.5 billion.

The United States is staging a diplomatic boycott of the Olympics. White House press secretary Jen Psaki declared that the boycott was in response to the “ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang.” The claim that China is engaged in genocide of the Uyghur population is a lie manufactured out of whole cloth. Washington is drawing on the playbook of Goebbels and Hitler, employing the technique of the “big lie,” repeatedly insisting on a falsehood of such spectacular magnitude that no one calls it into question.

The Biden administration attempted to orchestrate a global campaign of official boycotts involving other governments. A small number of close US allies followed suit, but the efforts were largely in vain. The end result was that the opening

ceremonies were deprived of the presence of the customary entourage of high-ranking American officials.

This is an Olympics being boycotted by the war-makers. Normally it is pacifists who will not go to a country that is making war, but now it is the opposite.

There is an objective logic to the rhetoric of lies spun by Washington and its pliant corporate media. Each must compound what came before. The headlines and editorial pages of the major papers around the world are imbued with the spirit of war propaganda.

An op-ed in the *Washington Post* on Monday argued that China was a “fascist state.” *Fox News* speaks of the “Genocide Olympics.” The *Economist* depicted a young woman of dual US and Chinese citizenship who chose to compete for China as a “Cold Warrior” being stolen by a Chinese hand with chopsticks. The chauvinist and openly racist targeting of China has immense consequences. Anti-Asian hate crimes rose 339 percent last year in the United States.

Washington had hoped that its provocative rhetoric would encourage athletes to boycott the opening ceremonies, but almost none did. Eighty percent of the American team participated and the majority of those absent were either at remote locations or quarantined with COVID. Looking to cover up the abject failure of these provocations, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced on Thursday that she “discouraged” Olympic athletes from protesting at the opening ceremony in Beijing, saying that it was not “worth the risk of reprisal from a ruthless Chinese government.”

Every lie from Washington stands reality on its head. They accuse the one country in the world that has taken the necessary public health measures to stop the spread of COVID of “human rights abuses,” while nearly one million Americans are dead of the virus. They denounce China for suppressing information, while they move to stop the reporting of daily cases and the total number of dead in the United States.

Washington declares its profound concern for the Uyghurs, and then demands China end its Zero-COVID policy. How many Uyghurs would die if Beijing followed Washington’s dictates? If China truly wished to carry out genocide, it could find no more effective means than implementing the domestic policies of the Biden administration.

China remains a country wracked by profound contradictions. Its extraordinary economic growth is driven by the intense exploitation of the working class and the foundations of its development rest upon the bloody massacre of workers at Tiananmen. The allegations and denunciations of China from Washington are a pack of lies, but China is no oasis of freedom and democracy.

China remains caught up in the fundamental problems posed by the 1949 revolution, which was deformed from the outset by the nationalist policies of its Stalinist leadership. It is impossible for the Chinese masses to liberate themselves from the threats of imperialism outside of a revolution of the

working class in the advanced capitalist countries. The remorseless objective logic of the pandemic has demonstrated that it is impossible to eliminate Covid on a national basis. Outbreaks will recur again and again, and will require aggressive measures to be contained.

The only way to put an end to the pandemic and its reign of mass death is through a globally coordinated policy to eliminate the virus building upon the scientific public health measures that have been put into practice in China. The success or failure of Zero-COVID rests with the international working class.

The thrust of all Washington’s propaganda is that China must end its Zero-COVID policy. Every day that this policy persists reveals to the world’s working class that there is an alternative to global mass death. The Winter Olympics has put this alternative at the center of world attention.

As opening ceremonies commenced in Beijing, the *New York Times* ran an article headlined “Zero-Covid in China” that made the following extraordinary statement: “China’s strategy would obviously not be possible in a country that emphasizes individual rights as much as the US does.”

The conclusion that flows inexorably from this declaration is that “individual rights,” as understood by the US ruling class, is opposed to—and certainly held to be more important than—the protection and saving of lives. But what about the “individual rights” of the one million Americans who have died because of the government’s refusal to implement effective public health measures? The only “right” left to a dead person is the right to be buried.

In essence, when the *Times* speaks of “individual rights,” it is concerned only with the “right” of capitalists to exploit labor, reap profits, and accumulate massive personal wealth. Where that conception of “individual rights” predominates over the right to live, the policy of Zero-COVID—i.e., the prevention of viral transmission and the elimination and eradication of COVID-19—is “obviously,” as the *Times* bluntly admits—not possible.

This is a devastating exposure—by the authoritative voice of finance capital—of the present-day priorities of American society. The *New York Times*, in its attack on the policy of Zero-COVID, has unwittingly made a powerful argument for socialist revolution.



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