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978-0-521-19477-8 - Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War  
Nicholas Evan Sarantakes

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## DROPPING THE TORCH

*Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* offers a diplomatic history of the 1980 Olympic boycott. Broad in its focus, it looks at events in Washington, D.C., as well as the opposition to the boycott and how this attempted embargo affected the athletic contests in Moscow. Jimmy Carter based his foreign policy on assumptions that had fundamental flaws and reflected a superficial familiarity with the Olympic movement. These basic mistakes led to a campaign that failed to meet its basic mission objectives but did manage to insult the Soviets just enough to destroy détente and restart the Cold War. The book also includes a military history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which provoked the boycott, and an examination of the boycott's impact four years later at the Los Angeles Olympics, where the Soviet Union retaliated with its own boycott.

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, a historian specializing in the World War II and Cold War eras, is an associate professor in the Strategy and Policy Department at the U.S. Naval War College. He has published a number of articles that have appeared in academic journals such as the *English Historical Review* and the *Journal of Military History*, military publications like *Joint Forces Quarterly* and the *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, and journalistic publications like *Texas Alcalde* magazine and ESPN.com. Professor Sarantakes is also chair of the Paul Birdsall Prize in European Military and Strategic History book prize committee for the American Historical Association and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

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# Dropping the Torch

JIMMY CARTER, THE OLYMPIC BOYCOTT,  
AND THE COLD WAR

**Nicholas Evan Sarantakes**

U. S. Naval War College



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*This book is dedicated to*

*Thomas Lang*

*Commander, USN*

*Strategy Seminars, 2008–2009,*

*U.S. Naval War College*

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## Acknowledgments

When I wrote my first book, one of the things that I learned – and it surprised me – is that a lot more people own the book than just the author. Everyone from the copy editor to the graphic design artist that puts together the dust jacket has some say in the final product. The author's name goes on the book, because ultimately the words that you are reading are the most important element of the publication and the part that takes the longest to produce.

In the case of this book, the writing took roughly five years, and in that half-decade, I encumbered a number of debts. Many people helped me in ways large and small. I tried to express my thanks to them at the time, but this section of the book gives me the opportunity to make a more enduring expression of gratitude.

The research for this book began in 2004 during a trip I took to the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, where I initially did research at the Samaranch Olympic Studies Centre for another project. I was visiting with my brother, then Captain, now Major Andrew T. Sarantakes, who was stationed in Germany, and he helped me with the logistics of that move. Making this trip was rather daunting at first, since I spoke neither French nor German. When I arrived at the museum, the staff was exceptionally polite and professional. I cannot recommend this facility enough, or Lausanne, or Switzerland. I finished that research rather quickly and then turned my attention to 1980. There was a ton of information, and I planned a second trip. The official languages of the Olympic movement are English and French, so all correspondence and records are recorded in both languages. The fact that Lord Killanin was a native English speaker meant that going through his personal papers did not require any additional language skills, which might have been the case were I examining events that transpired when J. Sigfrid Edström of Sweden was International Olympic Committee (IOC) president. While almost all of the material I wanted to examine in Switzerland was in English, the finding aides were available only in French. I was surprised at how much of that language I was able to pick up during my two trips. There

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were limits, though, and the archivists at the Samaranch Centre helped me when my comprehension of French hit a wall. During a brief conversation at an academic conference, Thomas A. Schwartz of Vanderbilt University encouraged me to pursue this research further and turn it into a book.

Most of the boycott effort took place in public. As a result, newspapers became an exceptionally important resource. While most academics are content to limit their research of public debate to the pages of *The New York Times*, I had no such luxury. A number of media outlets shaped the course of the boycott campaign. Robert G. Kaiser gave the effort an enormous push with his column in *The Washington Post*, and since the boycott was national in scale, it was the subject of commentary not only in general news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*, but also in others with a specialized focus like *Business Week* and *Sports Illustrated*. Editorial columnists in newspapers from around the country also weighed in on this topic, and important articles appeared in major newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* and in smaller ones like the *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*. Since the international Olympic movement is international in fact as well as in name, I had to do a fair amount of research in foreign newspapers. The summer I spent as a Junior Fellow in the newspaper reading room at the Library of Congress paid dividends long after I finished graduate school. Most of the newspaper research I did took place there. It was tough going since even as late as 1980, most major papers outside of a few titles like *The Times* of London and *The New York Times* made no effort to assemble an index. In addition, most electronic databases did not have holdings that reached back to 1980. I made do. I picked key dates and examined the microfilm holdings of particular newspapers at the Library of Congress. This process was slow, but I found a number of gems.

The account in this book is international in focus. There are important elements of the Spanish, Belgian, West German, Australian, and Canadian stories – to name just a few – that did not make it into this account; there are also plenty of studies waiting to be written about these events. The attempt here was to have a broad and international focus. To that end, I was multilingual in my research. French and English might be the official languages of the Olympics, but the movement involves nations that use languages other than those two. Much if not all of this debate was public in nature, and newspapers were an excellent source to examine the politics in countries like Spain and Germany. I used the same method of picking key dates for going through foreign-language newspapers as I did with domestic ones. It was a bit odd to read material I could not really understand, but I was fortunate that “Olympic” translates well into Spanish, French, and German. I found a number of useful items and then made photocopies like crazy. I then had others translate for me.

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## Acknowledgments

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The boycott was mentioned in several books that journalists wrote shortly after the events, which helped me understand how the issue played in the domestic politics of various nations. Needless to say, books on the Soviet perspective appeared in Russian, while those for West Germany were in German. A number of participants (both political and Olympian) wrote memoirs, and although all members of the International Olympic Committee read and speak either French or English, many chose to write in their native tongues.

As a result, many people helped me with these sources. While I was teaching at the U.S. Army Command & General Staff College (C&GSC), a student, Major Matthew C. Rinke, translated Korean titles. A friend of mine from graduate school, Lise Namakis, helped me acquire an important Russian-language publication, and a colleague of mine at the Staff College, Bruce Menning, did the translations. Since the end of the Cold War, the archives of the former Warsaw Pact have been a new area of exploration for those individuals with reading ability in the relevant languages. The Cold War International History Project has arranged for several scholars to translate and disseminate documents they have found in these archives. Although this work has made only a portion of these archives available, they have provided a useful service. Soviet and Hungarian documents that I used came through this venue. The Federal Republic of Germany was a major player in the boycott, and my friends, Sarandis “Randy” Papadopoulos of the Naval History and Heritage Command, Marc Mulzer, and another C&GSC colleague, Don Myer, translated German-language material for me. I picked up a lot of French while I was in Switzerland – there is no substitute for immersion as a way of acquiring and improving your foreign-language skills – but there was no way I could translate materials with accuracy. I leaned on a number of friends and colleagues for help with the French-language items. They included Michael Creswell of Florida State University, Michael Neiberg of the University of Southern Mississippi, Everett Dague of Benedictine College, and Michael F. Pavković, a colleague of mine at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

I was better with Spanish, having studied the language as a teenager, but still was not up to doing translation work on my own. My friend Kyle Longley of Arizona State University and my colleagues at the Command & General Staff College, Mark Montesclaros and Brook Allen, helped with the newspapers articles from Spain and several South American countries.

Robert Eldridge of Osaka University helped me acquire several Japanese-language books about the boycott. I did some of the translations, but Toshi Yoshihara, my colleague at both the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, and at Naval War College did most of this work. He also translated some Chinese terms for me.



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The boycott was international in nature, and even in countries quite similar to the United States, it played out differently given different political contexts. My friend, Galen Perras of the University of Ottawa, helped explain Canadian politics and gave me some tips on Canadian resources. Randy Papadopoulos grew up in Canada and provided me with even more information about things Canadian. Matthew Hughes of Brunel University in London and Simon Anglim, a graduate student at Aberystwyth University in Wales, helped me acquire material from the archives of the British Olympic Association. Amy Terriere of the BOA helped in this matter as well. I was fortunate to have this assistance. A few weeks later, a flood destroyed the records of the Association. I donated my materials back to the BOA, but future researchers should not expect my citations to these holdings to match those in use at a later date.

The U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) does not represent a foreign country, but Cindy Slater, the USOC librarian, helped me enormously during a trip to Colorado Springs – far more than I had a right to expect – and she deserves much thanks.

I am particularly grateful to Joe Onek and Anita DeFrantz for allowing me to interview them for this book. Onek and DeFrantz were leading the opposite sides of the boycott in 1980. I interviewed both in the same week – Onek in person and DeFrantz over the phone – and what struck me in both interviews was that both of them saw and respected the other point of view. That perspective was more important than the information they gave in the interview and was often absent – or at least pretty well hidden – from the written records from 1980. After those two sessions, I made an extra effort to not only be fair and balanced in my presentation, but to show that people on both sides of the issue saw and got the other point of view even if it still failed to convince them.

Writing, of course, is one of the production areas that the author dominates, but even then it is not absolute. There are copy editors who catch dangling participles and split infinitives, but even before a book gets to that stage, a good author will need lots of help. I am no different. Three friends read earlier drafts of this manuscript: Mike Creswell, Galen Perras, and Michael Ezra at Sonoma State University saved me from many errors, large and small.

In writing this study, I have tried to maintain – as much as possible – the original flavor of the times. The people writing the documents were busy people and they often made mistakes in grammar. Instead of correcting these with troublesome brackets and [sic]s I have decided to let things stand as much as possible as they were in the original. This will give the reader a feel for the flavor of the day, but will also make for the best read of this period in time.

During my work on this project, I was employed at six different institutions. I expect to be at the sixth, the Naval War College, for a good long while. Commander Thomas Lang, United States Navy, my teaching partner when

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I first arrived at the College, helped me make the crucial adjustment to a new institution. This book is dedicated to him as a token of thanks.  
Any defects that remain are mine and mine alone and come despite the assistance I have received.

NES  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Augusta, Georgia  
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Shreveport, Louisiana  
Midland, Texas  
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# Abbreviations

Despite valiant efforts to the contrary, a number of acronyms appear in the text. Many of these appeared in the original documents, and in some cases, like the KGB, the letters are better known than the proper name. The following is a list of the abbreviations in the text:

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
AOF	Australian Olympic Federation
BOA	British Olympic Association
BU	Boston University
CAB	Civil Aeronautics Board
C&GSC	U.S. Army Command & General Staff College
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CHL	Central Hockey League
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COA	Canadian Olympic Association
EAA	Export Administration Act
EC-9	European Union (before expansion)
FAZ	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (German: Frankfurt General Newspaper)
GANFO	Games of the New Emerging Forces
GRU	<i>Glavnoje Razvedyvatel'noje Upravlenije</i> (Russian: Main Intelligence Directorate)
IEEPA	International Emergency Economic Powers Act
IOC	International Olympic Committee
JOC	Japanese Olympic Committee
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (Russian: Committee for State Security)
LAOOC	Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee
MVP	Most Valuable Player
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBC	National Broadcasting Company

xvi	Abbreviations
NHL	National Hockey League
NOC	National Olympic Committee
NSC	National Security Council
PDPA	People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USOC	United States Olympic Committee
USS	United States Ship
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics