

US' Decision to Boycott Beijing's Olympics Escalates Global Tensions

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December 6 the White House confirmed that the US will not participate officially in the Winter Olympic Games, scheduled for next year, in Beijing. The decision was made based on strictly political issues, with the US government alleging China to be responsible for supposed human rights violations and anti-democratic policies. As a result, international tensions tend to escalate, as an important diplomatic tie is being broken, promoting an unnecessary politicization of sporting disputes.

Confirming a series of rumors and suspicions in recent months, the US government made it clear that the country will not participate in the 2022 Winter Olympics in an official way. In addition to harming the athletic and peaceful nature of the event, the decision also raised the current level of tension between US and China, as the justification given by the American government is based on unfounded accusations, which are constantly denied and refuted by the Chinese government, such as the allegations of systematic extermination of the Uyghur population and invasion plans against Taiwan.

White House Spokesperson **Jen Psaki** said:

“The Biden administration will not send any diplomatic or official representation to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games given the PRC's ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses (...) US diplomatic or official representation would treat these game as 'business as usual' in the face of the PRC's egregious human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang, and we simply can't do that (...) As the president has told President Xi [Jinping], standing up for human rights in the DNA of Americans. We have a fundamental commitment to promoting human rights and we feel strongly in our position and we will continue to take actions to advance human rights in China and beyond (...)”.

The boycott, according to information provided so far, will only take place on a diplomatic level. The US will not officially participate, but American athletes who want to compete will

be able to travel freely to China. These athletes will not be supported by any official representation of the American State, which will not mobilize diplomats or delegates to comply with the formal and ceremonial aspects of the event. The case will certainly also bring great discomfort to the American athletes themselves, who will compete practically without a flag, undermining the patriotic aspect of their performance.

The international tensions due to the boycott have already started. A few hours after the announcement, **Zhao Lijian**, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, made it clear that Beijing will apply countermeasures to Washington if the US government does not decline its attempt to boycott the event. The nature of such countermeasures has not been clarified, but there are several possibilities for reaction, both on a commercial and political level.

It is a naive attitude to view international sporting events as occasions of mere entertainment. In fact, the Olympics are also a great display of geopolitical strength, where Nation States demonstrate their soft power potential. However, boycotting an event of this size for purely political reasons seems an attitude of extreme politicization, whose consequences in the medium and long term can be severe. The precedent set by Washington will allow all countries to act in the same way in upcoming events. Considering that practically all States accumulate reports of human rights violations and have geopolitical rivals, every important sporting event could be boycotted by some country from now on.

For example, the 2024 and 2028 Summer Olympics are scheduled respectively for Paris and Los Angeles. France has several denunciations of human rights violations, mainly in Africa, and has very important nations as direct geopolitical rivals, such as Turkey. The same can be said about the US itself, which has military troops deployed on all continents, gathering reports of abuses and crimes all around the world, in addition to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the domestic arena, with constant racial and social tensions. If Turkey, China, Russia and other countries decide to boycott events in the US and France due to geopolitical disagreements, for example, the entire structure of global sport would be affected and the Olympics would lose part of its meaning as an opportunity for peaceful and respectful competition between nations. That is why the American precedent is so dangerous.

Even more troubling is the fact that there is no convincing evidence for the US to continue to endorse allegations of human rights violations against China. The alleged “genocide” against the Uyghur population is a conspiracy theory constantly spreading across the West, without any substantial proof. There is no credibility in this type of speech, as well as in the accusations about the existence of a possible Chinese plan to invade Taiwan. However, adopting conspiracy theories as official state discourse has become an increasingly common practice in the West, which has had serious consequences, such as the current Olympic crisis.

The International Olympic Committee should persuade Washington to change its stance, preventing the extreme politicization of sporting events. Otherwise, soon there will be no Olympics as we know them, with the big events turning into mere disputes of flagless individual athletes.

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