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Harnessing Human Rights to the Olympic Games: Human Rights Watch and the 1993 'Stop Beijing' Campaign

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Abstract

In 1993 Human Rights Watch, one of the two most influential human rights organizations in the world, launched a major campaign to derail Beijing's bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games. This article situates this highly publicized campaign in the context of Sino–US relations, the end of the Cold War, and the 'victory' of human rights as a global moral lingua franca. It argues that Human Rights Watch's decision to oppose Beijing's bid stemmed from its new post-Cold War focus on China combined with the organization's search for new ways to secure media attention and the funding that flowed from publicity. The campaign most likely swayed the International Olympic Committee's close vote in favor of Sydney. It also brought Human Rights Watch a windfall of favorable publicity among new audiences. The article argues that the campaign irrevocably inserted broad-based human rights considerations into the Olympic Games, decisively moving moral claims-making around the Olympics beyond the playing field. It also linked Human Rights Watch's moral legitimacy to US power in problematic ways and triggered a powerful anti-US backlash in China.

Keywords

China, human rights, Human Rights Watch, Olympic Games, sport, Sino–US relations

As each new Olympic Games approaches, host countries come under intense global scrutiny. In recent years, a familiar pattern has developed: human rights organizations and other pressure groups campaign loudly about human rights problems, especially but not only when the host city is in an undemocratic country, and the resulting controversies are now a routine feature of the dramatic build-up to the

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festival. Before the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, a global debate erupted over China's long list of political prisoners, suppression of religious minorities, support of Sudan's genocidal campaign in Darfur, and brutal treatment of Tibetan nationalists. Leading up to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, the global media highlighted Russia's anti-gay 'propaganda' law and its hostile climate for LGBT rights.¹ The International Olympic Committee has been forced to respond by paying lip service to human rights issues. In its Olympic Agenda 2020, adopted in late 2014, it copied language from the Article 2 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights into its Charter's revised non-discrimination clause, and it has inserted vague human rights provisions in future host-city contracts.²

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has been at the forefront of campaigns to leverage the Olympic Games into human rights-promoting enterprises, in ways that have had profound but unrecognized effects on the global human rights movement. In the last decade the New York-headquartered human rights group has published dozens of Olympic-related reports, issued hundreds of press releases, held conferences, staged demonstrations, gathered celebrity endorsements, and intensively lobbied governments, intergovernmental organizations, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In a world of proliferating human rights abuses, HRW has made human rights at the Olympics a magnet for the finite resources and attention of many human rights organizations. Although tangible improvements in human rights outcomes are, as always, hard to measure, such campaigns have unquestionably worked to popularize ideas of human rights among a broad global audience. The infiltration of human rights into sports events is a prime example of how all-encompassing and ambitious the human rights 'industry' has grown since its origins in the 1960s fighting for political prisoners.

This article analyzes a key shift: how and why the human rights community, and Human Rights Watch in particular, moved from indifference to engagement on the human rights effects of the Olympic Games, placing international sport on the

1 On human rights and the 2008 Beijing Olympics, see, for example, B. Kidd, 'Human Rights and the Olympic Movement after Beijing', *Sport in Society*, 13, 5 (June 2010), 901–10, and S. Brownell, "'Brand China' in the Olympic Context: Communications Challenges of China's Soft Power Initiative', *Javnost – The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, 20, 4 (2013), 65–82. On Sochi, see, for example, D. Van Rhee, 'A Skunk at the Garden Party: The Sochi Olympics, State-Sponsored Homophobia and Prospects for Human Rights through Mega Sporting Events', *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, 19, 2 (2014), 1–18. A recent study found that media outlets around the world covered human rights issues around the 2008 Olympics, the only exceptions being those in Cuba and some Muslim-majority countries. R. Sajna, 'Human Rights and Olympic Games in Beijing: A Study of 20 Prestigious Newspapers from Different Continents', *International Humanities Studies*, 1 (2014), 36–48.

2 Olympic Agenda 2020, 16, available at bit.ly/1wS3TED (accessed 1 September 2016); 6th Principle in the Olympic Charter (2015), 14, available at bit.ly/1fNiL1J (accessed 1 September 2016); S. Wilson, 'Rights Group Praises IOC on Human Rights Clause', Associated Press, 24 October 2014, at yhoo.it/1qUkETk (accessed 1 September 2016). The clause in question merely requires host cities to operate legally: 'take all necessary measures to ensure that development projects necessary for the organization of the Games comply with local, regional, and national legislation, and international agreements and protocols, applicable in the host country with regard to planning, construction, protection of the environment, health, safety, and labour laws'.

agenda of global human rights movements for decades to come. The roots of human rights pressures on sports mega-events have been little studied. Scholars of human rights have ignored international sport, while scholars of international sport have only recently begun to attend to human rights.³ The few accounts that discuss the origins of the linkage assume a long genealogy, dating to the 1936 'Nazi' Olympics.⁴ As this article shows, however, the link was established in popular consciousness only in 1993, when HRW played a significant role in creating it.⁵ It was in 1993 that HRW chose to mount a major campaign against Beijing's bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games. The effort seems to have swayed the narrow vote that awarded the event to Sydney instead of Beijing. It also turned the bidding, as one journalist put it, into 'the most highly publicized battle to host the Games ever seen in the history of the modern Olympic movement'.⁶

Drawing on internal documentation from HRW, extensive media coverage of the campaign, Sydney bid committee records, US government documents, IOC archives, memoirs, and interviews, this article argues that HRW's novel campaign should be understood as part of a larger story of Western anxieties about the rise of China and the recasting of human rights after the Cold War. It had large unintended and negative consequences for Sino-US relations, and though it spurred popular enthusiasm for human rights in the West, it did so in a way that suggested that punishing abusers would achieve results, when the opposite may have been true in this case. The Olympic campaign resurrected familiar narratives about dissidents, but brought them to hitherto untapped audiences, opening up a vast new terrain for human rights activism.⁷ The collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe in 1989 (and then in the USSR in 1991) coincided with a very different outcome in communist China, where the regime sent tanks into Tiananmen Square

3 On Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in 2008, see S. Brownell, 'Human Rights and the Beijing Olympics: Imagined Global Community and the Transnational Public Sphere', *British Journal of Sociology*, 63, 2 (2012), 306–27; on recent, locally based activism, see J. Boykoff, *Activism and the Olympics: Dissent and the Games in Vancouver and London* (New Brunswick, NJ 2014); on the use of sport by peace, women's, environmental, rights, and other movements, see J. Harvey et al., *Sport and Social Movements: From the Local to the Global* (London 2013).

4 See, for example, D. Warner, 'Human Rights in International Sports', in A. Mihr and M. Gibney (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Human Rights* (Los Angeles, CA 2014), 534–52.

5 The best account of Beijing's failed bid is G. Xu, *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895–2008* (Cambridge, MA 2008), 234–42. As yet no comprehensive history of Human Rights Watch exists. For an account of its evolution into the Reagan years, see P. Slezkine, 'From Helsinki to Human Rights Watch: How an American Cold War Monitoring Group became an International Human Rights Institution', *Humanity*, 5 (Winter 2014), 345–70. On its origins, the best account is B. De Sutter, 'The Paradox of Virtue: Helsinki Human Rights Activism during the Cold War (1975–1995)', Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Antwerp (2015). See also W. Korey, *NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Curious Grapevine* (New York, NY 1998), 339–67.

6 Quoted in W. Drozdiak, 'Sydney Wins 2000 Olympics', *Washington Post* (24 September 1993). Most accounts suggest the Tiananmen Square massacre made a Beijing bid unpalatable; see, for example, I. d'Hooghe, *China's Public Diplomacy, 1991–2013* (Leiden 2015), 224. On the reasons for the failure of Beijing's bid, see also S. Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (Chicago, IL 1995), 323. For more on the reasons for the IOC vote, see note 110 below.

7 HRW archives dealing with internal decision-making are almost entirely closed to researchers, and HRW denied me access to a number of documents relating to this topic.

to crush a student-led pro-democracy movement – while the world watched, horrified, on television. Hundreds of demonstrators were killed and thousands arrested. China suddenly drew prime attention from human rights groups.⁸ The Olympic bidding also coincided with HRW's decision to broaden its advocacy targets. Shifting from its exclusive focus on influencing US foreign policy, HRW sought to lobby a broader range of actors, including intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union.⁹ Targeting the IOC and actors that might influence the IOC reflected this expansion. Even though HRW did not lobby the US government directly on the Beijing bid, the organization's position gave credibility to opponents of the bid in Congress and the Clinton administration and hardened HRW's identification as an US organization wedded to US power. HRW's involvement in Olympic affairs was also a savvy way to buttress the group's power and prestige in a post-Cold War world in which human rights advocacy needed new audiences and new media-friendly messages. The strategies it adopted and the lessons it learned in 1993 have helped shape the world's moral expectations of sports mega-events ever since. The benefits in widening the Western public's embrace of human rights ideas came at the cost of tying ostensibly universal norms to US power and of sharply intensifying the hostility between China and the West. If – as seems likely – HRW influenced the Olympic vote, it is surely one of the most significant examples of the oft-cited rising power of non-state actors. A group with a staff of dozens, by lobbying 90 voting members of another private organization, decisively thwarted the ambitions of one of the world's great powers.

Before the 1990s, the claim that hosting the Olympic Games entailed human rights obligations was rarely voiced and lacked popular resonance. Although the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, debates over its lofty principles and their codification in more binding conventions – not achieved until the 1960s – remained for decades primarily the domain of international lawyers. 'Human rights' did not become a broadly popular slogan until the 1970s, when it became associated with struggles against torture and political imprisonment and for ensuring economic rights.¹⁰ Hints of the rising resonance of human rights language can be found in calls to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics even before the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, on the grounds that oppression of dissidents and Jewish and other religious minorities made the country an unfit host.¹¹ Yet the most important human rights organization at the time,

8 On the shift in attention to China, see J. Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten: Menschenrechte in der internationalen Politik seit den 1940ern* (Göttingen 2014), 828.

9 A. Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, NJ 2012); W. Brown, 'Human Rights Watch: An Overview', in C.E. Welch, Jr. (ed.), *NGOs and Human Rights: Promise and Performance* (Philadelphia, PA 2001), 79.

10 See J. Eckel and S. Moyn (eds), *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, PA 2013).

11 For evidence of the campaign, see the hundreds of letters, mostly from individuals and Jewish groups, in: Files of President Killanin, Memos Relies, and Jeux Olympiques 1980 – Boycott, 205430-20544,

Amnesty International, almost entirely ignored the Games.¹² HRW's predecessor Helsinki Watch used human rights arguments to *oppose* President Carter's Olympic boycott, arguing that it violated the rights of athletes and the Helsinki Accords' provision to work toward 'freer movement and contacts'.¹³ Carter's push to boycott the Moscow Olympics because of the invasion of Afghanistan drew in part on the language of human rights, which was a central theme in Carter's foreign policy, but the decisive charge was aggressive war. No human rights outcry was raised when Mexican police killed hundreds of protesting students on the eve of the 1968 Games, nor in 1981 when the IOC awarded the 1988 Games to Seoul soon after South Korea's repressive dictatorship massacred hundreds of protesting students.

The weakness of human rights pressures on the Olympics before 1993 is evident in Western reactions to protests in South Korea in the year before the 1988 Seoul Games. When unrest raised the prospect of repression on the eve of the Games, Western media and politicians expressed concern about security issues, but human rights groups hardly noticed. Searches of the database of human rights documents in Human Rights Documents Online (produced by the Human Rights Internet), the *Congressional Record*, and English-language media databases indicate that the notion that the Olympics should require human rights standards of hosts was simply not part of mainstream discourse. In one global media database, for example, English-language articles related to the Olympic Games rose sharply in 1987 and 1988, and reports mentioning human rights also rose. But the increase in coverage of the two together is barely noticeable: in 1988 only 20 articles discussed human rights in connection with the Seoul Olympics.¹⁴ Neither Amnesty International nor Asia Watch, soon to become part of HRW, pressed the

International Olympic Committee Archives, Lausanne, Switzerland; the papers of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, II: 1589, 1600, Manuscript Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and the British Foreign Office's reporting in FCO 28/3546 and 28/3548, National Archives, Kew, UK. Umberto Tulli has characterized such calls as influential in contributing to Carter's boycott and argues that the Olympics were 'an important field' in an emerging human rights discourse. U. Tulli, "'Boicottare le Olimpiadi del Gulag': I diritti umani e la campagna contro le Olimpiadi di Mosca", *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 1 (2013), 3–24, quotation at 3. These were years of significant activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry, of monitoring the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords, and of Carter's human rights diplomacy, so it is not surprising that this context produced some measured, human rights-based arguments against holding the Games in Moscow.

12 Amnesty used the approach of the Games to call attention to political imprisonment in the USSR, but made no appeals to boycott; see, for example, L. Downie Jr., 'Amnesty Asks Brezhnev to Release Prisoners', *Washington Post* (10 October 1979). Amnesty's publications from these years almost never mention the Olympic Games, and its International Secretariat and US section archives reveal very little attention to the issue.

13 Draft letter, Robert Bernstein, Orville Schell, and Aryeh Neier to Carter, 24 April 1980, Ser. I.1, Box 67, Human Rights Watch Records: Helsinki Watch, Columbia University, New York. It is not clear whether the letter was sent, but see also Aryeh Neier, 'Right to Travel', *The Nation* (3 May 1980).

14 Factiva, produced by Dow Jones, today collects media reports from over 36,000 sources and over 200 countries in 28 languages, though it is unclear what the database draws on in earlier periods. Dow Jones Intelligent Indexing uses automated categorization tools to sort articles by relevance. Using 'South Korea' as a region limiter helps ensure that the articles pulled up in a search relate to the Olympic Games in Seoul. The results described come from Factiva searches using the terms 'Olympic Games', 'human rights', and then both terms combined, with the regional filter South Korea applied.

Olympic issue.¹⁵ Both organizations issued reports on human rights conditions in South Korea, but neither mentioned the Olympics in more than a peripheral way. Amnesty's April 1988 report on human rights in South Korea did not mention the Olympics.¹⁶ Asia Watch issued reports in 1985 and 1987 detailing continued repression, but without calling for the Games to be used as a pressure point.¹⁷ When later asked why, staffer Richard Dicker said, 'Maybe we just didn't think of it'.¹⁸

Before 1993, the most prominent moral cause hitched to the Olympic Games was anti-racism, in campaigns targeting South Africa. The apartheid regime's 1956 ban on interracial competition provoked decades of boycott campaigns by anti-apartheid groups. Because of this pressure, the IOC banned South Africa from 1964 to 1988, and the country endured boycotts, bans and protests in sports from rugby to surfing. These efforts pressed moral claims on sports mega-events, but they differed in key respects from later campaigns fought under the banner of human rights. South African racism raised issues that related to athletic competition, for apartheid laws affected black South African athletes directly and visibly in ways that grossly violated the Olympic Charter's stricture, first formally introduced in 1949, against racial, religious and political discrimination.¹⁹ Moreover, while anti-apartheid campaigns sometimes cited human rights, they framed claims more often in terms of equality and anti-racism rather than under the umbrella of universal human rights.²⁰

What made HRW's 1993 innovation so consequential was that it decisively transformed the debate about the moral sphere of sports mega-events. Instead of talking about athletes and sports arenas, HRW widened the lens to encompass a country's treatment of *all* of its citizens. Its 1993 campaign addressed a limited set of human rights and targeted only the hosting country, but its implications were dazzlingly broad. Because 'human rights' is an extraordinarily expansive concept, HRW opened the door to a nearly limitless range of moral claims on the Olympics.

When Beijing declared its candidacy to host the 2000 Olympic Games, both the Olympic 'movement' and the human rights movement were struggling to redefine their missions in a giddy and unsettling post-Cold War order. For very different reasons, China held the key for both groups. For decades the Cold War had

15 The US Helsinki Watch was formed in 1979. It created an Americas Watch affiliate in 1979 and an Asia Watch in 1985. The various 'Watch' groups joined in 1988 as Human Rights Watch. In this article I refer exclusively to HRW, though media reports in 1993 referred both to HRW and Asia Watch.

16 Amnesty International, 'South Korea: Human Rights Developments, January–March 1988', April 1988, Human Rights Documents Online [Human Rights Internet]. Amnesty used the occasion of the Games to urge South Korea to release more political prisoners and to restore more civil liberties, but without linking the Olympics to human rights obligations. 'Amnesty International Urges South Korea to Free Prisoners', *Washington Post* (9 September 1988), A33.

17 Asia Watch, *Human Rights in Korea* (1985); Asia Watch, *Steady Crackdown: Legal Process and Human Rights in South Korea* (1987), in Human Rights Documents Online.

18 Telephone interview with Richard Dicker of Human Rights Watch, 8 January 2016.

19 D. Booth, *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (London 1996); D. Booth, 'Hitting Apartheid for Six? The Politics of the South African Sports Boycott,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 3 (2003), 477–93.

20 S. Dubow, *South Africa's Struggle for Human Rights* (Athens 2012); R. Irwin, *The Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford 2012), 188.

inflated the importance of the Olympic Games, as both sides in the conflict poured resources into winning medal tallies that the international community took as measures of the strength of the two socio-political systems. When the Cold War ended and the IOC needed a new driver to sustain global interest in the Games, China seemed the perfect fit, with one-fifth of the world's population, a booming economy, and a government eager to use such events to boost its international standing. 'The Titan Stirs' was the headline of a late 1992 article in *The Economist* that described China as a 'self-confident nuclear-armed [power] presiding over the biggest economy on earth'. A few months later, the International Monetary Fund used a new measure to peg China's economy at four times larger than previously thought.²¹ For human rights groups, too, the country's growing clout made it a natural post-Cold War target. In the early 1990s, with the Soviet bloc transitioning to democratic rule and right-wing dictatorships losing their core excuse for repression, China seemed a lonely outlier, a great power impervious to the historic inevitability of universal human rights.

Jiang Zemin's PRC staked enormous prestige on its bid to host the Games.²² China's leaders saw the 2000 Olympics as a way to cement the country's status as a global power at the beginning of the new millennium and to repair the reputational damage inflicted by the Tiananmen Square massacre. In light of its geopolitical and economic advantages, Beijing seemed the Olympic front-runner against rivals Sydney, Manchester, Istanbul, Berlin, and Brasilia. It was the clear favourite of IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch, who dreamed of the diplomatic coup of bringing China to the world stage – and, most likely, of the probable financial windfall for the IOC. The bid committee courted Samaranch, nominating the former Francoist official for a Nobel Peace Prize and translating a biography into Chinese.²³ 'We look upon the International Olympic Committee as God', the bid committee's head told the official *People's Daily*. 'Their wish is our command'.²⁴

As one observer put it, the competition for the millennium Games 'broke all records' for 'intensity and emotion'.²⁵ In the relatively free-wheeling days before the 1998 Salt Lake City vote-buying scandal led to reform, all the bid committees

21 J. Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, NY 2000), 285.

22 The earliest hint of such a bid had been aired in 1984; see R. Facht, 'Chinese May Bid for Games in 2000', *Washington Post* (25 July 1984). In 1985 Deng Xiaoping told a foreign leader that China hoped to host in 2000, and in 1990 Chinese president Yang Shangkun informed IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch of its intention to bid. See M. Worden (ed.), *China's Great Leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian Human Rights Challenges* (New York, NY 2008), 51. At the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the IOC was already anticipating a Beijing bid for 2000: see IOC vice president Richard Pound's comment that he hoped the unrest would be resolved 'positively' in time for Beijing to put in its bid. J. Christie, 'Turmoil in China May Affect Olympics', *Globe and Mail* (8 June 1989).

23 See the memoirs of China's IOC member and leading figure in the Beijing bid: Liang Lijuan, *He Zhenliang and China's Olympic Dream*, trans. Susan Brownell (Beijing 2007), 428; L. Sun, 'China Pulls Out Stops in Olympic Bid', *Washington Post* (15 July 1993).

24 S. WuDunn, 'Beijing Goes All Out to Get Olympics in 2000', *New York Times* (11 March 1993).

25 D. Biers, 'Stunned Chinese Look to 2004', AP (23 September 1993).

poured resources into their efforts, planning infrastructure and facilities for a massive event and cultivating stakeholders with favours and, in effect, bribes. (Manchester's bid chairman commented that he knew 'the shoe size of the second daughter' of one IOC member.)²⁶ The four bidding cities outside China spent \$154 million combined. Even in this overheated atmosphere, Beijing's efforts stood out. Whereas the Sydney bid committee peaked at about 50 staffers, the Beijing bid committee reportedly had 300.²⁷ Noting that on the day of the IOC vote the *Beijing Daily* ran no fewer than eight front-page stories on the bid, the Associated Press described the bid as 'a relentless international campaign' unparalleled since Deng Xiaoping had begun to open China to the outside world 15 years before.²⁸ The regime treated the IOC vote as a referendum on China's status as a great power. When the IOC inspection committee toured Beijing, factories were closed to reduce pollution, high school students and soldiers washed and painted the lane dividers on Beijing streets, and every taxi sported an Olympic sticker. For months, the city was festooned with banners, and the Olympic bid cropped up in everything from culinary competitions to a drive to rid the city of flies.²⁹ Chinese officials even promised they would inscribe the names of IOC members on the Great Wall.³⁰

It is not surprising that China was unprepared for the human rights outcry its Olympic bid provoked. Though Western democracies had imposed sanctions on the PRC after the Tiananmen Square massacre, China's booming economy gave the country considerable leverage. The West's desire for China's cooperation in the 1990–1 First Gulf War provided still more. By 1993, the PRC had already shaken off most of the sanctions imposed after 1989.³¹ There had never been a major, orchestrated human rights campaign around a hosting bid, and the Chinese regime underestimated the continuing strength of Western feelings about 1989. It appointed Chen Xitong to head the bid committee – the very official who as mayor of Beijing had signed the martial law decree authorising the use of troops to suppress the demonstrations at Tiananmen Square.

26 C. Brennan, 'Getting Olympics: No Simple Game', *Washington Post* (21 September 1993). For an astute analysis of the bidding process, see D. Booth, 'Olympic City Bidding: An Exegesis of Power', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 46, 4 (2011), 367–86.

27 The \$154 million figure is cited in 'Rival Olympic Lobbyists Spend More Than \$150m', *Financial Times* (20 September 1993), 1; staffing figures in: R. McGeoch with G. Korporaal, *Bid: How Australia Won the 2000 Games* (Port Melbourne 1994), 161.

28 D. Biers, 'Day of Reckoning in Beijing: Will the City Get the 2000 Olympics?', AP (23 September 1993).

29 D. Biers, 'Stunned Chinese Look to 2004'; Xu, *Olympic Dreams*, 234–5; L. Sun, 'China Has Biggest Stake in Olympic Games', *Washington Post* (21 September 1993).

30 J. Marschall Rigsby, Coordinator, Citizens' Campaign against the Beijing Olympics, to Orville Schell, Asia Watch, 28 April 1993, Box 402, Asia Watch Records, Human Rights Watch Collection, Columbia University, New York City, NY [hereafter 'AWR']; I. Thomsen, 'Sydney Beats Out Beijing for the 2000 Olympics', *International Herald Tribune* (24 September 1993); Biers, 'Day of Reckoning'.

31 R. Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders: The Global Community and the Struggle over Human Rights in China* (Oxford 2000), 113–14; N. B. Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945–1996* (New York, NY 2001), 437–8.

The PRC leadership no doubt took the IOC's rhetoric literally. Wei Jizhong, the Secretary General of the Chinese Olympic Committee, told a reporter in 1993: 'I have looked through all the Olympic charter and there is nothing to do with human rights'.³² He was right. In the 1970s and 1980s, the various iterations of the Charter talked about promoting 'international goodwill' but offered no specific goals. On the contrary, the Charter's mandate to resist 'pressures of any kind whatsoever, whether of a political, religious or economic nature' seemed applicable to human rights pressures, which are necessarily political. In 1991 a reference to respect for 'fundamental ethical principles' was added, but by implication it seemed an updated version of the traditional principle of fair play on the sports field.³³

The anti-Beijing campaign began when the IOC announced its shortlist of candidates in February and gathered steam as the September vote approached. The European Parliament passed a resolution urging that Beijing be rejected on human rights grounds. The Paris-based Alliance for a Democratic China compared the prospect of a Beijing 2000 Olympic Games to the infamous 1936 'Nazi' Olympics.³⁴ UK Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd declared that Beijing would be a 'bad choice'.³⁵ International human rights groups used the opportunity to generate publicity for their own reporting on China; thus, for example, the International Commission of Jurists issued a report on China's human rights record in June 1993 that urged the IOC not to ignore abuses.³⁶ The London-based human rights behemoth Amnesty International, constrained by its reluctance to advocate sanctions, took a quiet and only implicitly oppositional approach.³⁷ Within China, dissidents split over the issue, with some arguing that the Olympics provided an opportunity to open China and others fearing it would lead to more repression.³⁸

The loudest opposition came from the United States, and HRW's sustained campaign to stop Beijing was the largest mounted by any group. News reports called HRW 'a prime mover in the push' to block Beijing.³⁹ Smaller US-based

32 V. Finlay, 'China Will Open Up Anyway, Says Beijing Bid Leader', *South China Morning Post* (24 September 1993).

33 See Olympic Charter, 1978, 13, and Olympic Charter, June 1991, 7, both at 'The Olympic Charter Through Time', Olympic Studies Centre, at www.olympic.org/olympic-charters?tab=1 (accessed 11 January 2016).

34 L. Siddons, 'China Human Rights', AP (3 June 1993).

35 D. John and S. Vines, 'Hurd Opposes China Olympics', *Guardian* (17 September 1993); Cable, London to Washington, 'Media Reaction Report, London, Friday September 17, 1993', 17 September 1993, National Security Council Cables, Bill Clinton Presidential Library, Little Rock, Arkansas, FOIA Request [hereafter 'NSC Cables, CPL FOIA'].

36 S. North, 'Tiananmen May Dent Beijing Bid', *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 June 1992).

37 Amnesty International, of course, issued reports on human rights abuses in China, and its representatives testified to Congress about a 'human rights crisis in China'. Before the bid vote Amnesty suggested that a Beijing Olympics might lead to a flood of executions of political prisoners, and an Amnesty delegation also met with the IOC leadership right before the 1993 vote. But the organization took no public stand in opposition to the bid. See, for example, P. Goodspeed, 'A Sporting Chance', *Toronto Star* (8 August 1993); M. Myers, 'Olympic Vote Caught in Human Rights Crossfire', UPI (22 September 1993).

38 See, for example, W. Dan, 'Give China a Chance', *New York Times* (21 September 1993).

39 S. Beck, 'IOC Hired Lobbyist to Voice Concern over US Campaign', *South China Morning Post* (20 September 1993).

groups also mobilized against Beijing. The International Campaign for Tibet lobbied Congress and tried to 'strong-arm' US IOC member Anita DeFrantz.⁴⁰ The Washington-based Alliance for Democracy in China tried to make it 'unpalatable' to stage the Games in Beijing.⁴¹ But these groups struggled to be heard. Thanks to HRW's pre-existing clout and credibility, its views were the ones the media covered.

HRW's campaign succeeded in popularizing a proposition that till then had failed to gain traction: the Olympic Games should be responsible for broad-based human rights promotion well beyond the sports arena. As HRW staff attorney Richard Dicker told the press: 'It's way past due. . . . We want to change the attitude that this is sports and it has nothing to do with politics'.⁴² Although the Olympic campaign cost far less than other HRW efforts – where China was concerned, HRW devoted more resources to the high-stakes annual review of most favoured nation trading status – in some respects it had bigger payoffs. In addition to its likely influence on the IOC's vote, the campaign brought HRW much new and favourable publicity: one in four mentions of HRW in US media outlets in 1993 was about the anti-Beijing campaign.⁴³

HRW's aim was to shape public opinion about human rights, and the campaign revolved around publicity, rather than influencing Congress or the Clinton administration. So heavily did the organization rely on publicity in general that an external review of HRW in 1993 criticized 'a culture in which one's success is measured in large part by the number of inches one gets in *The New York Times*'.⁴⁴ Influencing the IOC was a goal, but one that could be achieved only via the media, given the IOC's reluctance to engage. The method, as Dicker described it, was 'to move the issue from the sports page to the editorial page to the front page', in the process reaching people not yet drawn to human rights. 'Nobody needed any explanation of the Olympic Games', he said, making it 'a huge opportunity to engage a very different segment of the population'.⁴⁵

40 L. Cyphers, 'Scoring Political Points: U.S. Activists Wage Fight Against Olympics in China', *Asian Wall Street Journal* (30 March 1993).

41 'Chinese in Australia Launch Anti-Beijing Campaign', Reuters News (26 May 1993). Taking aim at a country whose low labour costs represented a threat to American workers, the AFL-CIO asked the Clinton administration to oppose Beijing's bid and to demand more concessions in exchange for trading privileges. Press release, 'AFL-CIO Denounces China's Expulsion of Labor Activist and Calls on U.S. Government to Oppose Beijing Olympic Bid', 18 August 1993, Box 402, AWR.

42 Cyphers, 'Scoring Political Points'.

43 A comparison of the total results in ProQuest Historical Newspapers for 1993 for keywords 'Olympic*' and ('Human Rights Watch' or 'Asia Watch'), compared to just ('Human Rights Watch' or 'Asia Watch'), and counting only US-based media outlets, yields 241 hits for the former and 1054 for HRW generally. (In 1993, Asia Watch was a division of HRW, and news reports sometimes refer to Human Rights Watch and sometimes to Asia Watch.) The same search in Lexis-Nexis yields a similar proportion.

44 Management Assistance Group (MAG), 'Discussion Paper Regarding the Structure, Management and Organizational Development of Human Rights Watch', 8, 5 November 1993, Reel 7311, grant file PA930-0689, Grant Files, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY. I thank Bart De Sutter for providing me with a copy of this document.

45 Interview with Richard Dicker.

HRW's anti-Beijing campaign played to both the group's strengths and weaknesses. Because it was not a mass organization, HRW was nimbler than Amnesty International, and it was not constrained by Amnesty's narrow mandate. HRW staffers took pride in the organization's flexibility and creativity. In the 1980s, for example, HRW devised a way to apply human rights standards to armed conflicts, effectively inventing a new field for human rights advocacy. In the words of a 1993 external report, HRW staffers viewed their group 'as the place where innovative approaches to human rights are conceived and carried out' and valued its 'adventurous, pioneering nature [that pushed] the boundaries of the field to stay on the leading edge of human rights'.⁴⁶ Taking on the Olympic bidding process aligned with the aspiration to enlarge the terrain of human rights work.

The campaign also reflected HRW's propensity to leap into projects with little oversight, review, and political strategizing. The initial decision to oppose Beijing was made by HRW's chairman Robert Bernstein as he often did: on his own initiative and without consultation.⁴⁷ When the IOC announced the shortlist of bid cities, Bernstein took out HRW letterhead and wrote to the IOC to urge that human rights be considered in choosing a host city. He mentioned torture in Turkey and Brazil, where cities were also bidding, but he emphasized China's human rights problems. Newly retired as CEO of Random House, Bernstein had been an impassioned advocate for Soviet dissidents during the Cold War and in the late 1970s had helped found HRW's predecessor, Helsinki Watch, which monitored human rights abuses in the Soviet bloc. His colleague Aryeh Neier recalled that Bernstein identified deeply with imprisoned political dissidents – men such as Soviet scientist Andrei Sakharov and Argentine journalist Jacobo Timerman. 'When Timerman was tortured,' Neier wrote, 'it was as if Bob [Bernstein] was also force-fed and tortured'. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bernstein took up the cause of Chinese dissidents, working on China issues for HRW and helping Chinese academics in the US start a group called Human Rights in China, which received support from the government-funded National Endowment for Democracy.⁴⁸ Whether this group influenced Bernstein's initiative is unknown, but in 1993 it shared office space and worked closely with HRW. More generally, HRW shared Bernstein's post-Cold War interest in China.⁴⁹ Concentrating on the plight of mostly male Chinese dissidents, HRW evoked the familiar Cold War narrative of the moral hero battling totalitarianism.

46 MAG, 'Discussion Paper', 1–2. HRW experimented in other ways with new approaches and issues in these years, for example pursuing an unusually public and collaborative project to ban landmines beginning in 1992. See W. Wong, *Internal Affairs: How the Structure of NGOs Transforms Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY 2012), 152–3.

47 On lack of oversight and funding issues, see MAG, 'Discussion Paper', 3–8; on Bernstein's modus operandi, see *ibid.*, 6.

48 'Funding Human Rights: An International Directory of Funding Organizations and Human Rights Awards' (1993), in Human Rights Documents Online.

49 A. Neier, *Taking Liberties: Four Decades in the Struggle for Rights* (New York, NY 2003), 285, 154; quotation at 154; shared offices: interview with Richard Dicker.

Playing catch-up after Bernstein's unexpected initiative, Dicker wrote a memo suggesting ways to follow up. (Judging from the routing slip, it was signed off on, apparently without a meeting, by a couple of other staffers, illustrating what the external report called a 'lack of well-developed supervisory structures and policy-making processes' that often led to lack of vetting and review, especially of politically sensitive issues.)⁵⁰ Dicker proposed using the Olympic bidding as an opportunity 'to raise the question of human rights violations in the public eye here and generate exposure on government abuses' – less to pressure the IOC than to try to change the behaviour of 'the offending governments'. To avoid the 'appearance of political motivation', Dicker wrote, Turkey and Brazil would need to be mentioned along with China.⁵¹ Within a few months, journalists were calling Dicker 'the man behind the effort to derail China's bid'.⁵² But HRW's chief China researcher, Robin Munro, was taken aback in late March when he learned of the new campaign by reading about it in the Hong Kong press. Writing to New York for information, Munro was unconvinced of the campaign's merits. Chinese dissidents in Hong Kong were not calling to boycott Beijing, he noted, and he seemed inclined toward the view that the Olympics might bring publicity that would deter the government from large-scale arrests and give dissidents some breathing room.⁵³

The debate over whether a major event like the Olympics would help or hinder reform in China drew reasoned arguments on both sides, and HRW would take a different path the second time around, when Beijing bid again in 2001. Why was its opposition unequivocal in 1993? Dicker explains it as a consequence of the lingering shock and horror of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In his view, 'rewarding' China in 1993 would show that what happened in 1989 was 'forgotten – or forgiven'.⁵⁴ But the anti-Beijing campaign was also conditioned by HRW's efforts to secure continued relevance. HRW is concerned not only with promoting values but, like all organizations, with ensuring its own growth and influence. In 1993 it was coping with internal upheaval wrought by a post-Cold War enlargement of its ambitions, staff numbers, and scope. The group's chief fundraiser, executive director Neier, left in May, and his successor Kenneth Roth worked to bring the once independent Watch committees more firmly under a unitary HRW name. The organization was debating how far to internationalize its targets or whether stick to what historian Bart De Sutter calls the 'Neier Doctrine': leveraging the power of the United States to promote human rights. An Olympic campaign offered the chance to do both.⁵⁵ In 1993, it was also experiencing a revenue shortfall.

⁵⁰ Quotation from MAG, 'Discussion Paper', 7.

⁵¹ Dicker to Neier, Roth, and others, 'The Summer Olympics in the Year 2000', 12 March 1993, and the cover note attached to the memo, in Washington Office Files IX, Box 16, F. 3, Human Right Watch Records, Columbia University, New York.

⁵² J. Weiner, '2000, An Olympic Odyssey', *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (19 September 1993).

⁵³ Robin Munro to Richard Dicker, 'China Olympics Bid', 30 March 1993, Box 402, AWR.

⁵⁴ Interview with Richard Dicker; R. Dicker, 'Human Rights Would Lose in a Beijing Olympiad', *International Herald Tribune* (23 June 1993).

⁵⁵ On the organizational pressures that drove HRW decision-making, see De Sutter, 'Paradox of Virtue'; on the 'Neier Doctrine', see *ibid.*, 91.

Unlike Amnesty International with its mass membership base, HRW was precariously dependent on four major funders, which tended to measure impact in terms of headlines, giving HRW an incentive to play to issues with strong media appeal.⁵⁶

In targeting China, HRW was not coincidentally taking on a popular target of US ire. For years after the Tiananmen events, the dominant emotions in US opinion toward China were hostility, indignation and disgust. China became a hot-button issue in US politics, with China-bashing again a favoured sport in Congress.⁵⁷ As a State Department China specialist described, in the early 1990s the US love-hate relationship with China swung sharply in one direction. 'When things are going well with China, and China is being good,' he said,

Americans think China is wonderful. It's all panda bears, and rosy-cheeked kindergarten children And then when China does something bad, like Tiananmen, then China can do no right. There is this overwhelming desire . . . to somehow punish and correct China.⁵⁸

In the eight months leading up to the IOC vote in September 1993, HRW made itself the most prominent organization lobbying against Beijing. Major US media outlets took up the topic with alacrity, running hundreds of articles; the television news networks gave the issue prime-time coverage.⁵⁹ Their accounts overwhelmingly portrayed HRW in laudatory fashion. A few dissenting voices chastised HRW for 'mixing sports and politics', and a minority argued for holding the Games in Beijing as a spur to reform, but the vast majority of the media reporting toed the line that HRW took, repeating its arguments, quoting its spokesmen, and playing to the public's desire to 'punish' China.⁶⁰ Beijing's formal bid application, for example, guaranteed that no organizations would emerge in China to oppose the Olympics, and HRW seized on this 'extraordinary assertion' as evidence that the PRC would suppress free speech if awarded the Games. It cited the Chinese statement throughout the campaign, turning this element of Beijing's bid into perhaps the single most widely quoted statement in media coverage of the bid.⁶¹ Immediately before the IOC vote, leading voices such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* ran editorials urging a 'no' vote on Beijing – the *Times* no fewer than three editorials in two days. Citing HRW information and echoing its

56 On funding and publicity, see MAG, 'Discussion Paper', and Korey, *NGOs*, 347–9, 361.

57 R. Greenberger, 'U.S., Unhappy With Beijing's Abuse of Human Rights, Focuses on Olympics', *Wall Street Journal* (23 August 1993); Tucker, *China Confidential*, 437–8, 446.

58 D. Anderson quoted in Tucker, *China Confidential*, 450.

59 See above re ProQuest Historical Newspapers keyword searches. On TV news, see, for example, ABC Evening News, 3 September 1993, Vanderbilt Television News Archives.

60 For an example of a pro-Beijing argument, see the case made by investment banker Jonathan Kolatch: J. Kolatch, 'Beijing Deserves the 2000 Olympics', *Washington Post* (30 July 1993).

61 This conclusion is based on a survey of hundreds of media reports from Factiva and the hundreds of newspaper clippings in Asia Watch's archives (Box 402).

arguments, the *Times* wrote that 'China Doesn't Deserve the Olympics' because of the 'overriding issue' of human rights.⁶²

HRW's diplomacy targeted all major stakeholders in the Olympic Games: the media, national governments, the IOC, and Olympic corporate sponsors. Dicker issued press releases, gave interviews, and called sportswriters. HRW wrote to US IOC member Anita DeFrantz to warn that China would suppress free speech at the Games. It kept up a drumbeat of reports on political prisoners. Bernstein threatened that if Beijing won, HRW would pressure athletes to boycott the Games.⁶³ When the IOC met to vote in Monte Carlo, Dicker was there, sitting in hotel lobbies and pressing new stories of Chinese human rights abuses on the 900 assembled journalists.⁶⁴

In an unprecedented effort, the organization took aim at the lifeblood of the Olympic 'movement' by drawing into the controversy major Olympic Games advertisers, including Coca-Cola, Visa International, Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Time Warner. These advertisers, which under the IOC's marketing model place the Olympic rings on their products and advertisements, are willing to pay large sums in order to associate their brands with ideals such as excellence, peace and solidarity, making them sensitive to the tarnishing of those ideals.⁶⁵ A month before the IOC vote, Bernstein wrote to major sponsors about human rights abuses in China, warning that a Beijing Olympics would hurt their image.⁶⁶ It was a savvy move that drew the Olympics out of the sports pages and countered one of the Beijing bid's greatest strengths: the desire of Olympic advertisers for privileged access to China's booming market. It garnered wide media coverage, including calls to corporate headquarters for comment, where spokesmen were quick to say their companies remained neutral.⁶⁷

HRW's case against the bid was underpinned by the conviction that universal human rights were now firmly established as a global moral standard, and as such, they should apply to everyone, including China and the Olympic Games.

62 'China Doesn't Deserve the Olympics', *New York Times* (21 September 1993). See also Abe Rosenthal's sharp condemnation of Beijing the same day: A. M. Rosenthal, 'The Olympic Decision', *New York Times*, (21 September 1993), and Bernstein's editorial the day before: 'China: A Regime that Tortures Doesn't Deserve the Olympics', *New York Times* (20 September 1993).

63 Letter, Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director, to Anita DeFrantz, 26 April 1993, Box 402, AWR; 'IOC Pressured to Make Beijing a Forbidden City', *New York Times* (21 April 1993), 18. For the IOC's response, which said although human rights would 'undoubtedly be one of many factors' influencing the voting, the prime task of the IOC was the evaluate technical issues, see: NOC Relations, IOC, to Bernstein, 'Bid to host the Games of the XXVII Olympiad – human rights', 20 April 1993, Box 402, AWR.

64 Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1994 - China and Tibet*, 1 January 1994, at bit.ly/IOVEeVe (accessed 24 April 2015); Weiner, '2000, An Olympic Odyssey'.

65 See the account by a former IOC marketing director: M. Payne, *Olympic Turnaround: How the Olympic Games Stepped Back from the Brink of Extinction to Become the World's Best Known Brand* (New York, NY 2006).

66 Letter, Robert Bernstein to Steven Weisman, *New York Times* (16 August 1993); Letter Template, Robert Bernstein, 3 August 1993, Box 402, AWR; M. Dodd, 'Sponsors Hear Plea to Block Beijing Bid', *USA Today* (25 August 1993).

67 L. Siddons, 'Olympics-China', AP (25 August 1993).

Impatience courses through many of HRW's statements: it was *time* for human rights. Bernstein wrote that rights had attained fundamental importance in the world today, so 'it is past time' that they be part of the Olympic Games. As Deputy Director Kenneth Roth put it in April, the world was now 'freed from the highly charged political considerations of the Cold War', so the IOC 'can and should' now take human rights into consideration.⁶⁸ A *Washington Post* editorial illustrated this brand of human rights triumphalism: 'This is 1993. The world is changing. Large-scale systemic human rights violations are incompatible with the conduct of a nation seeking status as a late-20th century Olympics host'.⁶⁹ How should the Olympics include human rights? HRW urged the IOC to give its members full reports on the human rights situations in prospective host countries – not only passing along the information already compiled in human rights reports by HRW, Amnesty International, and the US State Department, but also doing its own investigations and writing its own human rights reports.⁷⁰ The suggestion must have struck the aristocrats, sports administrators, and former athletes who filled the IOC as ludicrous: there could be few bodies *less* well equipped to monitor human rights conditions than this corrupt and autocratic club.

In keeping with HRW's practice of calling for sanctions to punish human rights violators, the organization argued that giving the Games to Beijing was wrong because it would 'reward' China for repression. It pushed the idea that hosting a major event had to be 'earned'; countries had to 'deserve' it. Respect for human rights should be a consideration for the IOC, HRW argued, 'so that especially abusive governments are not rewarded'. As Dicker put it: 'If the IOC awards Beijing the Games, it will send a clear and dangerous message to the Chinese leadership: Your human rights practices are good enough for us'.⁷¹

Finally, HRW used emotional appeals to paint China's continuing repression as a kind of arrogance toward the West. Dicker, for example, characterized Chinese statements about a lack of opposition to the bid within China as 'astounding' and 'boast[ful]'.⁷² Referring to Chen Xitong's appointment, Dicker claimed:

Here you have a country that just four years ago horrified the world with its human rights policies. ... The fellow who was out greeting the IOC delegates when they visited Beijing is the same fellow who was in no small part responsible for the events at Tiananmen. That is so insensitive, that is so arrogant, it is astounding.⁷³

68 Letter, Roth to DeFrantz.

69 'Olympics of 2004', *Washington Post* (16 July 1993).

70 Letter, Roth to Jean-Michel Gunz, NOC Relations, 30 April 1993, Box 402, AWR.

71 R. Dicker, 'Human Rights Would Lose in a Beijing Olympiad', *International Herald Tribune* (23 June 1993). See also Press release, 'Human Rights Watch Welcomes House Resolution 188, July 26, 1993', Box 402, AWR.

72 Dicker, 'Human Rights Would Lose'.

73 S. Brunt, 'IOC Ignores Human Rights When Awarding Games', *The Globe and Mail* (21 June 1993).

What did HRW mean by human rights? Unlike Amnesty International, with its still quite narrow mandate, HRW monitored an expansive range of civil and political rights. In its Olympic campaign, however, the violations it decried related only to detention and maltreatment of dissidents. When it gave examples, it cited the Tiananmen Square events and the arrests, imprisonment, and torture of men who opposed the communist dictatorship. The selection of abuses was deliberate. As Dicker explains, the idea was to keep the public eye on the consequences that continued to flow from the 1989 massacre.⁷⁴ The group's early commitment to target Turkey and Brazil alongside China was quickly dropped (Brasilia dropped out in early August), and the campaign became not a general human rights effort but, as HRW described it, a 'serious effort' to 'stop China from getting the Olympic Games'.⁷⁵

The group struggled to link human rights to Olympic ideals. Like the Chinese, HRW could find no mention of human rights in the Olympic Charter. Peace and international goodwill were too vague to pulled into service as prohibitions on political imprisonment. But HRW paid homage to the Olympic mythology with references to 'Olympic values' and 'the Olympic spirit'. Writing to the IOC and the US Olympic Committee, for example, Bernstein cited Olympic ideals as reason to oppose the bid: 'Holding the Olympics in a country known for imprisonment for the mere expression of ideas...flies in the face of the Olympic Spirit'.⁷⁶ Stepping onto shakier ground, HRW also argued that China practiced discrimination 'on the basis of political ideas' that should be considered a violation of the Charter's ban on discrimination.⁷⁷ As Dicker recalls, it was not so much that the IOC made claims that could be leveraged to support human rights promotion but that its own self-portrayal as 'loftier than the angels in heaven' made it vulnerable to moral claims.⁷⁸

HRW's position dovetailed with the aims of the Sydney bid organizers, who were desperate to undermine Beijing without violating the tradition that bidding cities do not criticize rivals. Peter Woolcott, the head of international relations for the Sydney bid, explained:

China's human rights record was seen as a significant weak spot for them, and how to play this issue was very much part of the committee's thinking about appropriate strategies. The themes around the Sydney bid were set up, in part, as a counterpoint to Beijing's claims – the emphasis was on the environmental, the friendly, the fresh and the bold, and images associated with democratic virtues.⁷⁹

74 On which abuses were highlighted see, for example, Letter, Roth to Bondy, New York Times Sports, 19 May 1993, Box 402, AWR; on why: interview with Richard Dicker.

75 Letter, Robert Bernstein to Benjamin Heineman, G.E. Company, 11 August 1993; Letter to Robert Fulghum, 16 August 1993, Box 402, AWR.

76 L. Cyphers, 'Scoring Political Points: U.S. Activists Wage Fight Against Olympics in China', *Asian Wall Street Journal* (30 March 1993).

77 Letter, Bernstein to Samaranch and Leroy Walker, USOC, 8 February 1993, Box 402, AWR.

78 Interview with Richard Dicker.

79 Telephone interview with Peter Woolcott, (head of international relations for the bid committee on secondment from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), 8 June 2016.

As worries about Beijing mounted, the Sydney team hired an international communications strategist, who reported that, along with other problems such as inadequate infrastructure and pollution, Beijing was ‘internationally unacceptable in terms of human rights policies’. Spurred by the report’s recommendation that Sydney mount a public relations campaign ‘to illustrate how the awarding of the Games to Beijing would be a gross betrayal of the ideals of the Olympic charter’, bid team head Rod McGeoch worked out a plan with Sir Timothy Bell, a leading public relations consultant to the Conservative Party in the UK, to spend up to half a million dollars funding a human rights group in London to speak out about China’s human rights problems and to publish a book on the topic to appear a month before the IOC vote, all without implicating the bid committee as the funder. The Australian IOC members on the committee board shut the effort down in April, fearing a calamitous backlash if it were exposed. McGeoch pushed back, arguing: ‘Look out if we lose, because if there’s one or two votes in it, we’ll all have to bear the responsibility of not doing everything we could’. The board prevailed: the publicity was unnecessary, they said, because others – like Human Rights Watch – were already doing the job.⁸⁰

HRW’s position also aligned with that of an even more powerful ally: the US government. As a presidential candidate, Bill Clinton had criticized the Bush administration for ‘coddling’ the ‘butchers of Beijing’, and he pledged to make most favoured nation (MFN) trade status for China contingent on human rights criteria. He took office just as Olympic bidding was reaching fever pitch. After first announcing that he would insist on ‘continued progress’ on human rights before the annual renewal of MFN status, in May he issued an executive order granting a one-year extension that conditioned subsequent renewal on ‘progress’ in areas such as release of political prisoners. When that renewal came up a year later, Clinton and Congress would bow to clamorous business interests and abandon the effort to link MFN to human rights. During the crucial half-year before the IOC vote, however, the administration’s China policy strongly emphasized human rights, drawing the ire of PRC leaders who accused the administration of interfering in their internal affairs.⁸¹ Sino-US relations hit their lowest point since 1972. In 1993–4, China’s military began planning for a possible war with the United States, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to think in the same terms toward China. As a Pentagon official put it, ‘Both sides, in effect, [were] finding the other a convenient substitute for the Soviet Union as an enemy’.⁸²

Congruent with its broader human rights stance, the administration tried, unsubtly, to undermine Beijing’s Olympic bid. When the IOC reluctantly conceded that human rights should be a factor in awarding the Games, the State Department

80 McGeoch, *Bid*, 222–34 quotation at 233; interview with Rod McGeoch, Melbourne, 9 June 2016. See also the later revelations by journalists who claimed to have seen some of the briefing papers: G. Ryle and G. Hughes, ‘Breaking China: How Sydney Stole the Games’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 March 1999).

81 M. Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 4th ed. (New York, NY 2016), 191–3. On MFN, see the detailed account in Mann, *About Face*, 274–97.

82 Charles Freeman quoted in Tucker, *China Confidential*, 472.

applauded the statement and pointedly noted that China's record was deficient. As a spokesman put it, the Department 'communicated its views' to US IOC member Anita DeFrantz by providing her with its 1993 human rights reports on potential hosts.⁸³ Though claiming it took 'no view' on which city should get the Games, the administration admitted that sending DeFrantz the human rights reports was aimed at China.⁸⁴

The executive branch also offered tacit support to the legislature's much less restrained opposition.⁸⁵ In July the House overwhelmingly passed a resolution sponsored by California Democrat Tom Lantos – one of the 1983 cofounders of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus – which opposed Beijing's candidacy and urged DeFrantz to vote against the bid.⁸⁶ In the Senate, New Jersey Democrat and former Olympian Bill Bradley led the campaign, declaring: 'I don't think it's right to give the games to a country that imprisons and tortures political dissidents. I think it's one way the world can say that we don't approve of the gross disregard of human rights that takes place in China.'⁸⁷ Bradley convinced 60 of 100 members of the Senate to sign a letter to Samaranch asking the IOC to vote against Beijing because China's leaders 'clearly do not deserve' the 'stamp of approval' the Games would confer. If Beijing won, the letter warned, the regime would be strengthened, dissidents demoralized, and the Olympics tarnished.⁸⁸

The Chinese leadership was outraged, calling Congressional pressure 'gross interference' and an 'insult' to the Chinese people.⁸⁹ He Zhenliang, IOC Vice President and head of the Chinese Olympic Committee, took the unusual step of writing to the rest of the IOC to express his dismay and incredulity at the House's 'unfair treatment' of China.⁹⁰ Olympic officials, too, found the political pressure unseemly. DeFrantz did not publicly condemn her government's efforts to pressure her on how to vote, but she made it clear that she was unhappy. Sydney's McGeoch

83 Cable, Washington to East Asia and Pacific Posts, '27 July Press Guidance for the EAP Region', 28 July 1993, NSC Cables, CPL FOIA.

84 State Department spokesman Michael McCurry, in Cable, Washington to All Posts, 'Daily Press Briefing – September 17, 1993', 18 September 1993, 5, NSC Cables, CPL FOIA.

85 A State Department official wrote to a top member of the House: 'The administration strongly believes that a country's human rights performance should be an important factor in the selection of a site for the 2000 Olympics'. R.S. Greenberger, 'U.S., Unhappy with Beijing's Abuse of Human Rights, Focuses on Olympics', *Wall Street Journal* (23 August 1993).

86 Beck, 'IOC Hired Lobbyist'. See also the resolution opposing Beijing by the House Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations, and Human Rights: S. North, 'US Congress Opposes Beijing's Olympic Bid', *Sydney Morning Herald* (12 June 1993), 9.

87 'Interview: Senator Bill Bradley discusses his opposition to having the Olympic Games in China in 2000', *NBC News: Today* (24 June 1993). Bradley's papers at Princeton University are closed to researchers.

88 Senate letter to Samaranch, 9 August 1993, Box 402, AWR. Bradley chose not to ask for a formal Senate resolution after talking to USOC officials, who warned him that official US pressure might backfire, pushing IOC officials to vote for Beijing simply to assert their independence; see C. Brennan, 'U.S. Politicians Give IOC Gold Medal', *Washington Post* (24 September 1993).

89 R. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.–China Relations, 1989–2000* (Washington, DC 2003), 170.

90 He Zhenliang to All Members of the IOC, 2 September 1993, Villes candidates JO d'ete 2000: Beijing: general, D58/006-30H, IOC Archives.

complained that the House resolution provoked a backlash in the IOC against what members saw as ‘political’ interference, and there were rumours that four IOC members had changed their votes to Beijing just to demonstrate their independence.⁹¹ Samaranch commented irritably that he found it ‘difficult to understand why a country that has given China most favored nation status to develop its trade with it, asks us today not to give it the Games’.⁹² Several IOC officials, including DeFrantz, suggested that if hosting the Games had been conditioned on meeting human rights standards, Atlanta and Los Angeles might never have been chosen.⁹³

The IOC initially underestimated HRW’s campaign, as evidenced by its dismissive attitude toward HRW’s early appeals. Before the 1980 Moscow Olympics, as hundreds of letters poured in protesting the USSR’s human rights record even before the invasion of Afghanistan, its director had responded by telling letter writers to bring complaints to their national Olympic committees, not the IOC.⁹⁴ In 1993 its response to hundreds of similar letters about Beijing was more mollifying: by May, with media pressure intensifying, it was assuring writers that human rights would be a factor in the vote.⁹⁵ Deeply concerned as Congress became restive, the IOC hired a lobbyist to work with the US Olympic Committee to head off Congressional challenges on human rights front. Their ‘strong defensive effort’ succeeded in watering down the actions in both House and Senate. In the House, the lobbyists secured the deletion of language urging the IOC in general to vote against Beijing, instead directing the appeal only to the US IOC member. In the Senate, the lobbying succeeded in downgrading a proposed resolution to a much less significant letter – all on the grounds that the perception of ‘political interference’ would harm the Olympics.⁹⁶ Samaranch, like many others in the IOC’s leadership, professed to believe that China’s staging of the Games would lead to reforms.⁹⁷ As his close colleague Dick Pound put it: ‘If you really want to influence a change in the behavior of China, [the Olympics are] a way to do so.

91 Cable, Canberra to Washington, ‘USIA—Media Reaction Report, September 9, 1993’, 9 September 1993, NSC Cables, CPL FOIA.

92 L. Sun, ‘China Has Biggest Stake in Olympic Games’, *Washington Post* (21 September 1993).

93 Ibid.; S. Brunt, ‘IOC Ignores Human Rights When Awarding the Games’, *Globe and Mail* (21 June 1993). On Anita DeFrantz, see ‘Robert Bernstein Draft for Op-Ed’, n.d., Box 402, AWR.

94 See, for example, Monique Berlioux to John Roberts, 7 August 1979, Jeux Olympiques 1980 Boycott 205444, IOC Archives.

95 See, for example, Jean-Michel Gunz, Deputy Director, to John Cunningham, 12 May 1993, Villes candidates JO d’été 2000, Beijing: Protestations, 152/011-23A, IOC Archives.

96 Quotation in Peter S. Knight to Francois Carrard, ‘Senator Bradley’, 16 July 1993; Peter S. Knight to Francois Carrard, ‘House Foreign Affairs Mark-up’, 21 July 1993, Villes candidates JO d’été 2000: Beijing: Protestations, 152/011-23a, IOC Archives.

97 Dicker, ‘Human Rights Would Lose’. Samaranch had sent a telegram of ‘support and sympathy’ to the Chinese Olympic Committee during the Tiananmen Square crackdown, and when attending the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing had insisted that sport and politics remain separate. J. Kohut, ‘Olympic Chief Gave Support During Dissident Crackdown’, *South China Morning Post* (12 April 1991); S. Faison, ‘Asiad Success Key to China’s Olympic Hopes’, *South China Morning Post* (24 September 1990). Other IOC leaders also played down Tiananmen Square’s impact on the China bid – including the Australian IOC vice president, Kevan Gosper; see S. North, ‘China the One to Beat in Olympic Race’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 March 1992).

It's a made-in-heaven opportunity'.⁹⁸ But Sydney bid head Rod McGeoch was closer to the mark: he recalls having the impression that the IOC's top brass felt that human rights were simply irrelevant – they were 'not part of our world'.⁹⁹

Unlike the Congressional actions, which seemed so politicized they provoked a backlash within the IOC, HRW's opposition to Beijing likely carried more weight with IOC members because the media portrayed the group as a neutral, disinterested monitor. Although HRW worked with members of the European Parliament to pressure the IOC, Dicker recalls making no special effort to lobby Congress. He testified before a Senate hearing on the issue, warning that the bid 'has very, very high stakes for human rights', but members of Congress most often cited State Department (not HRW) reports on human rights in China, and their floor statements often played up issues such as atheism, communism, and forced abortions more than the human rights issues HRW emphasized.¹⁰⁰

In the week before the IOC vote, the Chinese, in a fit of nerves, belatedly adopted a more conciliatory stance on human rights. The government released three jailed dissidents and invited a French human rights group to visit imprisoned dissidents. The bid committee's spokesman, Wu Jianmin, who had previously made his statements in Chinese by reading from notes, gave an impassioned, apparently heartfelt statement in fluent English. 'It's not fair', he said. 'The Chinese government cares a lot about human rights', citing the country's success in feeding and providing jobs for its booming population. Asked about HRW's claims that the government was waiting till after the vote to put more dissidents on trial, he denied the charge so angrily that he had to apologize for his outburst.¹⁰¹ The concessions were too little, too late.

On 23 September 1993, 90 members of the IOC met in Monte Carlo to choose among Manchester, Istanbul, Berlin, Sydney, and – still considered the favourite – Beijing. Sydney seemed a close second, having put together what the IOC called an 'almost perfect' technical presentation (Beijing's was deemed 'realistic and solid').¹⁰² On the day of the vote, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher reiterated that human rights should matter, but promised to accept whichever city won.¹⁰³ After each of the first three rounds of voting, Beijing led, as

98 First quote in: 'Blunders that May Lose China the 2000 Games', *South China Morning Post* (20 June 1993); second in: W. Drozdiak, 'Sydney Winds 2000 Olympics', *Washington Post* (24 September 1993). According to McGeoch, Pound voted for Beijing. Interview with McGeoch.

99 Interview with McGeoch.

100 See, for example, the statements in 'Expressing the Sense of the House that the Olympics in the Year 2000 Should not be held in China', 139 Cong. Rec. H5096-5100 (26 July 1993); quotation from Dicker in: *Hearing on S. Res. 117 and S. Res. 124, Prohibition of the Olympic Games in Beijing, Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate, July 15, 1993*, 23. See also C. Brennan, 'Lawmakers Urge Rejection of China's Bid for Olympics', *Washington Post* (16 July 1993), G1.

101 'Emotional Beijing Official Says Criticism Is "Not Fair"', *International Herald Tribune* (21 September 1993); S. Parry, 'Chinese Olympic Official Makes Emotional Plea', Reuters (21 September 1993).

102 'Olympic News', *Journal of Olympic History*, 1 (1993), 31, at bit.ly/1Vohnbz (accessed 11 January 2016).

103 'U.S. Would Accept Any Olympic Choice – Christopher', Reuter (23 September 1993). The State Department and the US Olympic Committee had prepared a statement to be issued if Beijing won,

Manchester, Istanbul, and Berlin were voted out. After the fourth round, Samaranch opened the final envelope. He seemed so surprised by what he read that he had to repeat 'and the winner is' twice before he could say the name of the city. It was Sydney, by a mere two votes.¹⁰⁴ The Chinese delegation was so stunned that only a few of its 200 members could muster the obligatory applause for the winner. Dicker, elated as he watched the vote announced, had written two press releases, one for a Beijing win and the other for a Beijing loss. He joyfully crumpled up the first and sent out the second, which was quoted in most of the major US papers: 'It was impossible for the IOC to ignore China's egregious human rights record. This decision puts the Chinese leadership on notice that they will pay a price for the continued abuse of their own citizens'.¹⁰⁵

How much did human rights matter? The reasons for the individual votes that made Sydney the winner remain known only to the 88 IOC members who voted in the final round. It was later revealed that the Sydney team had bribed two African IOC officials – enough in itself to swing the vote, though other bid committees surely bribed as well.¹⁰⁶ At the time, many observers thought that the human rights campaign played an important role. The *New York Times* speculated that it had been essential:

Beijing's candidacy appears to have fallen victim to China's human rights record and arguments by Western politicians and human rights groups that a Government that continues to repress dissidents should not be rewarded with the honor of holding the 2000 Olympics.¹⁰⁷

HRW seemed happy to accept credit for stopping Beijing's 2000 bid.¹⁰⁸ The next year, its report looking back on human rights in China in 1993 began by noting that 'international concern' over China's human rights abuses had derailed its

promising that American athletes would participate despite earlier Congressional threats to force a boycott. Brennan, 'U.S. Politicians Give IOC Gold Medal'. On earlier rumours, see Brennan, 'Lawmakers Urge Rejection'.

104 H. Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games* (St. Lucia 1994), 440; A. Riding, '2000 Olympics Go to Sydney in Surprise Setback for China', *New York Times* (24 September 1993).

105 W. Drozdak, 'Sydney Wins 2000 Olympics', *Washington Post* (24 September 1993); Press releases, 24 September 1993, Box 402, AWR.

106 Ryle and Hughes, 'Breaking China'. The Sydney bid team heard rumors, reportedly attributed to at least one senior Chinese official, that the Chinese were bribing some IOC members or their associates with payments of US\$50,000. Mark Jackson, Manager, International Relations, to Lobby Team, 6 September 1993, Box BID 0498, Sydney Olympics 2000 Bid Limited Records, Sydney Olympic Park Authority, Sydney, Australia [hereafter: 'Sydney Bid SOPA']. Reports also circulated that the PRC would try to secure votes by calling in favours and using its foreign aid ties as leverage, especially in Africa and the Middle East. Beijing to Canberra, 'China: Olympics 2000 – Status of Beijing Bid', 19 January 1993, Box BID 0498, Sydney Bid SOPA.

107 Riding, '2000 Olympics Go to Sydney'. California Democrat Tom Lantos, who had pushed for the House's anti-Beijing resolution, said there was 'no doubt' that the resolution had had an impact on the vote; C. Brennan, 'U.S. Politicians Give IOC Gold Medal', *Washington Post* (24 September 1993).

108 Aryeh Neier does not mention the campaign in his memoir or in his history of the human rights movement, perhaps in part because he left HRW in May 1993. He mentions Beijing's failed bid without noting HRW's role: Neier, *Taking Liberties*, 280.

attempt to host the Olympics.¹⁰⁹ The group's persistence, wedded to its credibility on human rights, may well have convinced a few IOC members that a Beijing Games in 2000 would provoke too much of a media firestorm.¹¹⁰

After investing so much political capital in the bid, China experienced the loss as a major political setback. Many Chinese, from the bid committee to ordinary citizens, saw the defeat as a humiliation and the US as the spoiler that had taken aim at China out of fear and envy of its rising power. For months the media had given substantial attention to the opposition in the US, especially the House resolution. Even before the vote, ordinary Chinese expressed resentment of the US role. 'If we don't get it, it's the United States' fault,' a Chinese student told a Western journalist in the days before the bid.¹¹¹ To the IOC, Chinese officials expressed 'great indignation' about US and British interference in Olympic affairs.¹¹² Western journalists canvassing public opinion found anger and anti-American hostility. A student in Tiananmen Square, hearing the news, shouted that Beijing lost because of 'America's interference. The Americans are afraid China is becoming too big a power'. Another student echoed those sentiments: 'I am so angry. If America had not interfered, we would have won'.¹¹³ In the coming months, Chinese propagandists used the vote as an example of why China had to oppose US pressure. The event spurred rising anti-Western sentiment among Chinese intellectuals. As one scholar put it, 'more than any single event', the perception that the US had swayed the Olympic vote 'convinced students, intellectuals, and ordinary Chinese alike that the United States opposed *China*, not [just] the Chinese government'.¹¹⁴ Asian leaders such as Malaysia's Lee Kuan Yew echoed this view.¹¹⁵

In 2001, when Beijing bid again, this time for the 2008 Games, Human Rights Watch took a more cautious approach. Its new position was that human rights should matter in site selection, 'but we are not opposed *a priori* to China getting the Games' because media attention might lead to greater openness. When asked about its change of heart, the group explained that because the 2000 Games marked the new millennium, they had special symbolic significance, and that awarding them to China so soon after the Tiananmen Square massacre would have been

109 Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1994 – China and Tibet*, 1 January 1994, at: bit.ly/1OVEeVe (accessed 24 April 2015).

110 One former IOC member had told the Sydney bid committee that human rights would be a factor 'in some quarters': Keith Baker, Ambassador to Mexico, reporting on the comments of former Mexican IOC member Eduardo Hay, to Roderick McGeoch, 12 March 1993, Sydney Bid SOPA.

111 L. Sun, 'China Has Biggest Stake in Olympic Games', *Washington Post* (21 September 1993).

112 'Report on a meeting with Beijing 2000 Olympic Games Bid Committee', 19 January 1994, Villes candidates JO d'été 2000: Beijing: General, D58/006-30H, IOC Archives. See also D. R. Schweisberg, 'City Loss Leaves China Seething But Graceful', UPI (23 September 1993).

113 'Residents of Beijing Blame U.S., UK for Olympic Loss', *Toronto Star* (24 September 1993); J. Parker, 'China Gropes for Olympic Scapegoats, New Purpose', Reuters (24 September 1993).

114 J. Fewsmith, 'The Impact of WTO/PNTR on Chinese Politics', *NBR Analysis* 11, no. 2 (2000): 50; emphasis added.

115 See 'West "Plotting Against China"', Reuters (24 September 1993).

inappropriate. Yet HRW specifically denied that China's human rights record had improved since the last bid.¹¹⁶

No doubt HRW correctly judged that China was unlikely to be voted down a second time and that an oppositional stance would diminish its capacity to press for reforms before and during the Games. Partly, too, the PRC was now willing to address human rights concerns; in the oral bid presentation to the IOC voting session, for example, China's representative claimed that the Olympics would help the development of human rights.¹¹⁷ HRW also decided that the most effective strategy for addressing a sport-minded audience was not outright condemnation but an optimistic, feel-good approach, one that played to sport fans' conviction that sport was a force for good. As one HRW official explained, 'we didn't want to rain on the parade'.¹¹⁸ HRW's approach to the 2008 Games emphasized the moral value of the Games and the prospect that they would lead to reform, as long as the world kept up its pressure.

When political scientist Samuel Huntington famously proposed in 1993 that the West and the rest of world were engaged in a 'clash of civilizations', he called the stop-Beijing campaign 'a not-insignificant victory against China'.¹¹⁹ His comment encapsulates the costs and weaknesses of HRW's first Olympic effort. HRW was instrumental in preventing China from hosting the 2000 Games, and the campaign brought it an increased measure of fame and – most likely – fortune. It represents one of the rare cases when China paid for its imperviousness to Western human rights norms. But targeting China spurred rising powers across Asia to challenge human rights as a Western or American construct and to promote instead 'Asian values'. The 1993 campaign came when 'human rights reached its zenith' in global politics, as historian Jan Eckel has suggested, but also when the US dominated a unipolar world – developments that were closely related.¹²⁰ HRW's targeting of China aligned precisely with the interests of the US government, so that even if it was not doing US bidding or lobbying the US government directly, the campaign married HRW's moral standing to US power.¹²¹

HRW's campaigns around sports mega-events have been significant for both the Olympic Games and human rights. By accepting Olympic enthusiasts' claims that

116 Human Rights Watch World Report 2001: China, 'Questions & Answers: China and the Olympic Games 2008', 1 March 2001, at bit.ly/1sFCSJB (accessed 20 January 2016).

117 HRW's Minky Worden told an interviewer that she thought the 2008 Olympics worsened the human rights situation in China but that boycotting Beijing would have resulted in a counterproductive ultranationalist response from China. Brownell, 'Human Rights and the Beijing Olympics', 317, 313.

118 N. Bequelin, Senior Researcher, Human Rights Watch Hong Kong, personal communication.

119 S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY 1996), 197. The book was based on a widely read 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article.

120 J. Eckel, 'Utopie der Moral, Kalkül der Macht. Menschenrechte in der globalen Politik seit 1945', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 49 (2009), 482–4.

121 In the view of critics like Stephen Hopgood, this marriage has had dangerous consequences. As Hopgood writes, 'Human Rights Watch's real legitimacy comes from proximity to American power, American money, and American values. This is no kind of legitimacy at all outside the United States'. S. Hopgood, 'Peter Slezkine Roundtable: The Sword and the Cross', 2015, *Humanity*, at bit.ly/1TOydy4 (accessed 13 January 2016). See also the critique of the global human rights regime HRW has helped create in S. Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY 2013).

the Games are a force for good, HRW has lent legitimacy to the IOC as a moral actor at a time when it is facing serious challenges on other grounds, including the enormous costs of hosting the Games. Today human rights are the most prominent rubric for framing moral claims around international sport. Moral pressures on sports mega-events, once grounded in issues rooted in the sports competitions themselves, have spilled over at a dizzying pace into areas with no obvious connection to sport. Human rights advocacy groups now pressure international sports competitions to promote basic freedoms (of press, speech and religion), judicial reform, and fair employment practices in countries hosting the events. Although many sports fans probably remain indifferent to the cause, the media spotlight on the Olympics reaches such an enormous audience that it would be hard to argue that there has been any arena of contestation over human rights that has had more widespread publicity. Yet the 1993 Beijing story should make us cautious about campaigns with emotionally appealing slogans that mask major moral and political complexities. There are no sure methods for righting human rights abuses, nor does the international community agree on a universal set of priorities for ranking the multiplicity of rights, so punishing or shaming Olympic hosts and host candidates on human rights grounds offers no guarantee that benefits will result – and it may dispose us to forget that the mind-boggling sums spent on each transient event may well constitute the most significant human cost of the Games. Risks, too, should be considered: human rights pressures, unless managed very deftly, may on balance produce long-term harm in the form of lasting resentments and a heightened threat of international conflict.

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