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## Situation Twenty-One

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## **Situation Twenty-One**

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April 6, 1896 redefined international relations. It was on April 6, 1896 that Baron Pierre de Coubertin first saw the Games of the I Olympiad take life. Rooted deeply in the conviction that athletic competition fosters transnational peace, the Olympics were more than an athletic competition. They were a symbol of a global community. A global community that would cast aside political differences every four years in the name of athletics to celebrate the innovation and forward-thinking of its nations. This proved to be the fatal flaw of Coubertin's Olympiad: seventy-six years after the first modern Games, the Olympics failed. The 1972 Games in Munich did not uphold the Olympic symbol of a global community. When the Palestinian terrorist group Black September took eleven Israeli athletes and coaches from the Olympic Village hostage and killed them, the notion of international peace was shattered. Overly obsessed with appearing as a stable, forward-thinking nation, the West German Organizing Committee, led by Avery Brundage, modulated security and ignored substantive warnings from forensic psychologist Georg Sieber, consequentially destroying the very principle of international peace established on April 6, 1896.

Relying on his studies of classical history, Pierre de Coubertin adopted the spirited conviction that athletic competition, like that of Ancient Greece, cultivated a strong moral character and unified men from all aspects of life. Thus, he worked tirelessly to promote physical education in French schools.<sup>1</sup> Born into an aristocratic Parisian family, Pierre de Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, attended the newly established Externat de la rue de Vienne.<sup>2</sup> Here, Coubertin finished within the top three students of his class. Exemplifying such a remarkable educational capability, Coubertin might have

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press ND, 1996), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, 5

pursued a number of professions.<sup>3</sup> However, instead of choosing the path of a politician or joining the military, Coubertin focused his energy on physical education. First observing this phenomenon in a visit to Rugby School in 1883, he came to believe that “no education...can be good and complete without the aid of athletics.”<sup>4</sup> Thomas Arnold had previously been the headmaster at Rugby School and had introduced a prominent sports culture there. During his visit, Coubertin saw firsthand the effects of Arnold’s physical education. However, it was not simply a good game of cricket that Coubertin desired. Influenced by his knowledge of the original Olympic Games in Athens, Coubertin strove for what he called the “triple unity.”<sup>5</sup> A concept where the Olympics served as a platform to unify the young and the old, men of different disciplines, and people from a variety of backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> Coubertin recognized that in a growing “democratic nation,” this sense of solidarity would strengthen not only the ruling class, but also the average citizens.<sup>7</sup> Through a physical education, men would learn sportsmanship and maturity that could not be found in the classroom. Coubertin considered these virtues to be necessary for a progressive nation, the nation he saw France becoming.<sup>8</sup> Coubertin strategically pointed out that athletics encouraged a physically fit nation. With the defeat in the Franco-German War still stinging the minds of Frenchmen, a healthy nation meant a nation prepared for war. Coubertin presented the image of an ideal nation. He even went so far as to credit athletics in school with the

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, 5

<sup>4</sup> Pierre de Coubertin. “The Olympic Games of 1896,” *The Century Magazine*, November 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, 6

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Coubertin, “The Olympic Games of 1896”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

growth of England's power in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> This combination of firsthand observations with a knowledge of ancient Greece fueled Coubertin's desire to institute physical education systems in French schools. Despite his effective reasoning and unabridged passion, however, Coubertin failed.

Having been unable to promote athletics in French schools, Coubertin adjusted his focus to reviving the Olympics, a concept rooted in stimulating international peace and respect among nations. It took five years and a number of failed attempts for him to muster enough support to restore the Games. Prior to Coubertin's efforts, a variety of similar athletic competitions had been held in individual countries, but it was only with his establishment of the International Olympic Committee in 1894 that the modern Olympic movement was truly underway. Only two years after the committee's founding, the Games of the I Olympiad took place. Held in Athens' Panathinaiko Stadium, a gesture of homage to the ancient games, the Olympics drew participants from fourteen separate nations. Considered a great success, Athens set the precedent for the next thirty games. Coubertin recognized that the Olympics would essentially be a melting pot of different nations who would all be bringing different languages, religions, and politics to the table. While he acknowledged that these distinctions might be too strong for athletes to necessarily "like" each other, he was confident that they could learn to respect each other.<sup>10</sup> It was the nature of the game. This respect was the foundation for the Olympic ideal, "Olympism is constructed around three core values: excellence, friendship, and respect."<sup>11</sup> The committee even went as far as to revive the tradition of the "Olympic Truce," a pact originally enacted in Ancient Greece by three kings who signed a peace

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, 5

<sup>10</sup> Hill, 8

<sup>11</sup> International Olympic Committee, "The Olympic Movement," *The Olympic Museum*, 2007.

treaty during the Olympics to ensure the safety of their athletes and spectators.<sup>12</sup> With this agreement, the committee symbolized their commitment to “build a peaceful and better world through sport.”<sup>13</sup> An ideal that has weathered 116 years of war, financial turmoil, and political strife proved to be an overly optimistic view of the Games.

Rather than a haven from international conflict, the Olympics became a reflection of political struggles both within and among nations. A propensity particularly notable in the 1936 Olympic Games. Frustrated after being excluded from the 1920 and 1924 Games, Germany was thrilled to host the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary Olympics. German dictator Adolf Hitler soon recognized the Games as a strategic propaganda platform. Political agendas quickly began to overshadow the Olympic preparation and the IOC found itself struggling to keep Hitler’s exploitation in check. He began by attempting to remove Theodor Lewald (whose grandmother had been Jewish) from his position as the President of the Berlin Organizing Committee, only to be chastised by the IOC and forced to reinstate him.<sup>14</sup> The committee applauded itself for quelling the racism and upholding the virtues of excellence, friendship, and respect. Pressures from the IOC or other nations, however, would not deter Hitler. Countries frequently used the Olympics as a podium to show the world their national pride, their innovations, and their forward thinking. The Nazis were determined to use the Games to promote their Aryan ideals. While most nations felt unease at the idea, Americans in particular pressured the IOC to ensure proper treatment of their Jewish athletes in Berlin.<sup>15</sup> The committee went so far as to threaten Hitler with the removal of the Olympics from Berlin if Jewish athletes were

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<sup>12</sup> International Olympic Committee, “The Olympic Movement”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* (United States of America: Human Kinetics, 1999), 50, 51,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

excluded from the German team.<sup>16</sup> Despite the Committees interference, Germany's unabashed exploitation of the Games presented the country as hostile and narrow-minded. It was with this tarnished past that West Germany began to plan the 1972 Olympic Games.

In preparation for the 1972 Olympics, the Munich Olympic Committee was overly fixated with compensating for the 1936 Games by appearing to be a forward thinking nation. The Berlin Olympics had presented Germany as an aggressor, captivated by discrimination and narrow-mindedness. These Games would be different. The committee strove for an atmosphere of joviality, serenity, even playfulness to envelope the 7,131 athletes participating in the games.<sup>17</sup> In a cruel twist of irony, Germany even went so far as to make the official motto "The Happy Games." For a few days, the Munich Olympics upheld this ideal: America's Mark Spitz set a new record in the pool with seven gold medals, and Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut won the hearts of viewers worldwide. For a few days, everything went according to plan. For a few days Munich had created a peaceful congregation of nations in an honorable upkeep of Olympic tradition. Then those days ran out.

Western Germany's fixation with crafting a reputation of serenity resulted in dangerously relaxed security, making an invasion by the terrorist group Black September an achievable feat. Guns and bulletproof vests, the more traditional outfit of security, did not help the existent perception of Germany as a hostile nation nor did they support the ideal of "The Happy Games." Thus, for the 1972 Olympics, Germany traded the

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<sup>16</sup> Senn, 52, 53.

<sup>17</sup> ---, *The Modern Olympics*, ed. Peter J. Graham, Horst Ueberhorst (Cornwall: Leisure Press, 1976), 197, 193

traditional uniform for a sky blue blazer and walkie-talkies.<sup>18</sup> The security service was recruited from various level of the police force, so it was assumed that they did not need a significant amount of training for the Games.<sup>19</sup> In one instance, several hundred Maoist demonstrators gathered on a hill in Olympic Park. The guards persuaded them to leave by distributing candy. While confections aligned perfectly with the pastel-colored German ideal, they were not an effective security measure. This negligent attitude applied to Olympic Village as well. The ground-floor apartment at 31 Connollystrasse where the eleven Israelis were taken hostage was protected solely by a six and a half foot wire-netting fence. The official report compiled by the Organizing Committee of the Munich Games stated that the Village “should be no en-closed fortress with walls, barbed wire and watchtowers.”<sup>20</sup> It certainly was not. The Olys learned to look the other way and rarely checked ID as athletes passed in and out of the village at their leisure.<sup>21</sup> This was when the athletes even used proper entrances; instead, after nights out on the town, athletes would often return to the Village and simply jump the fence. This was the same tactic used by Black September on the fifth of September. In a *Sports Illustrated* interview one of the massacre’s masterminds, Abu Daoud, confesses that he had gained access to the Olympic Village on two occasions prior to the attack. He was not asked to present any sort of identification. During these visits, Daoud inspected the Israeli’s apartment and put the finishing touches on the terrorist attack that no one saw coming.

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander Wolff, “When the Terror Began,” *Sports Illustrated*, August 26, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Munich Organizing Committee, *Die Spiele* (Munich: pro Sport München, 1972), 32.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Oly” was the name given to the German authorities that provided security at the Games.



No one that is, except Georg Sieber.<sup>22</sup>

Forensic psychologist, Georg Sieber was hired by the Organizing Committee to investigate safety precautions for the Games and presented the Committee with a situation almost identical to the Munich Massacre, yet the authorities failed to prepare for the attack because it did not coincide with their ideal of a peaceful Olympics. While planning the Games, thirty-nine year old police psychologist Sieber was asked to “tabletop” the event for safety preparation.<sup>23</sup> Taking into consideration the variety of nations participating and examining closely the militant groups within them, from the Palestine Liberation Organization to the Irish Republican Army, he returned with twenty-six possible situations to prepare for. The twenty-first situation was notable.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Sieber’s twenty-first situation predicted the Munich Massacre almost exactly. Only minor differences, such as Black September breaking in at 4:10 am rather than 5:00 am, existed. He foresaw the murder of two hostages upon invasion (Moshe Weinberg and Yossef Romano) and the demands for freedom for political prisoners from Israeli jails (256 Palestinians plus two German radicals, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof).<sup>25</sup> He even foretold of the demand for a plane to fly “to an Arab capital” (Cairo).<sup>26</sup> Sieber predicted the Massacre almost terror for terror, but he did not predict the eight failed rescue missions by the German authorities. He did not foretell the blatant lack of preparation by German authorities. It did not matter how detailed a report Sieber gave the Organizational Committee because they refused to take the necessary safety precautions prior to the

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<sup>22</sup> Wolff, “When the Terror Began”

<sup>23</sup> “Tabletopping” is a safety measure taken before the event to examine all possible conflicts that might arise between nations at the Games and thus prepare for them.

<sup>24</sup> Wolff, “When the Terror Began”

<sup>25</sup> Michael Morris Killanin, *My Olympic Years* (New York: William Morrow Company, Inc., 1983), 65.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Games. Instead, they continued on with a narrowed view, blinded by memories of failed Games of the past. With Hitler's Olympic exploitation and their already-tarnished reputation weighing heavily on the minds of Avery Brundage and the rest of the Committee, they disregarded Sieber's Situation Twenty-One.

When the International Olympic Committee failed to provide sufficient security and ignored Sieber's report, they allowed the 1972 Munich Games to become more about politics than peace. This deficiency allowed Black September, to send a message to Israel that drew in the entire world. Named for two Palestinian villages whose inhabitants had been ousted by the Jewish military, Haganah, "Ikrit and Biram" escalated an already threatening situation with Israel.<sup>27</sup> Black September saw an opportunity in Munich, a country desperate to show the world that they had moved past their Nazism. Just as they closed one door, another was opened. The West Germany Organizing Committee itself did not commit the crime, but they share the blame. Palestine and Israel had been engaged in an ongoing battle over a number of issues, mainly control of Jerusalem, for the better part of the twentieth century. This was not a new conflict; this should not have been astonishing to German authorities. The event had been anticipated, but it had also been ignored. Just as Brundage and his Committee manipulated the Olympics to appear forward-thinking, Black September used the Olympics to bring attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>28</sup> The primary goal of the terrorists was not to free Palestinians in Israeli jails. It was to make a political statement. Leaving the world in a standstill, the Games had to go on. The Munich Games continued until officially closed on September 10, but their infamy would live on. Ikrit and Biram would not be forgotten, and within a

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<sup>27</sup> "Ikrit and Biram" is the name Black September gave to the Munich operation.

<sup>28</sup> Wolff, "When the Terror Began"

year Israel formulated a lethal response. Operation Wrath of God, authorized by Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, targeted those believed to be behind the Massacre. The operation included other attacks such as Operation Spring of Youth and is believed to have lasted over twenty years. Even today, as the two nations are on the brink of war, the legacy of the Munich Olympics is evident.

The 1972 Munich Olympics challenged Pierre de Coubertin's notions about peace stemming from athletics, but more importantly the Munich Massacre illustrated the seriousness that must be adopted when hosting the Games. When West Germany committed to "The Happy Games," the nation put both athletes and audience members in danger. The Munich Organizational Committee tried to appear forward-thinking by focusing on their past. Progress, however, does not make a successful Olympics. Safety makes a successful Olympics. Germany spent less than \$2 million in securing the Munich Olympics.<sup>29</sup> Twenty years later, the London Olympics organizers budgeted 533,000,000 pounds (\$691,713,710 USD) for security.<sup>30</sup> The problem was not that Germany could not provide the troops; in fact the 2012 London Olympics faced a shortage of security as well, though not by choice. Determined to "[l]eave nothing to chance," British Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt asked for more troops, calling up 18,200 from the American government. London's Ministry of Defence guarded the games with two warships, typhoon jet fighters, Puma helicopters, and surface-to-air missiles.<sup>31</sup> The 2012 Games would not be like the Munich Olympics. Twenty years and nine summer Olympics had lapsed, but 1972 was no doubt in the minds of the London Organizational Committee as

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<sup>29</sup> Wolff, "When the Terror Began"

<sup>30</sup> Simon Rogers, "London Olympics 2012- Where Does the Money Come from and Where is it Spent?" *The Guardian*, July 26, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Smith-Stark, "London's Olympic Security Headache," *CNN*, July 26, 2012.

they arranged security for the Olympics. Munich served as a worldwide reminder. A reminder that while international peace was Coubertin's primary goal in reviving the Olympics, the safety of participants and spectators are far more important. The Committee substituted serenity for safety.

The haven that Coubertin created, defined by the values of excellence, friendship, and respect was interloped by hostages, murder, and political games in Munich. The 1972 Games are still felt today, not only as a devastation, but also as a controversy. For the London Olympics 2012, it was requested, by the widows of the Israeli athletes, that there be a moment of silence during the opening ceremony in remembrance of the Israelis who lost their lives forty years ago.<sup>32</sup> That request was denied. Despite the insistence of numerous political leaders including President Obama and leaders from Canada, Israel, Australia, and Germany, the International Olympic Committee refused to allow a moment of silence. It is a request that has been prominent for forty years, yet the IOC continuously rejects it, claiming that the Opening Ceremony is not the appropriate time for such a saddening act. The 1972 Olympics will continue to remind host countries that Pierre de Coubertin gave them the duty not only to foster international peace, but to protect the rights and safety of the participating athletes. On April 6, 1896, Pierre de Coubertin saw a global community come together. Seventy-six years later, on September 5, 1972, that community fell apart. The Massacre and its legacy will continue to be a controversial event, and despite the IOC's attempts to stifle it, it will be remembered.

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<sup>32</sup> Christine Brennan, "London Olympics Pauses to Honor Dead Brits, Not Israelis," *USA Today*, July 27, 2012.

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