

Monday, March 17, 2008

Tibet is but one reason to consider not watching the Chinese Olympics.

Image from NASA's website. Every government violates human rights to one extent or another. Consequently, every choice for an Olympics game site involves the political, unless the games are limited to an Olympics-governed parcel of land set aside exclusively for all Olympics games. When the International Olympics Committee chose China for the 2008 summer Olympics, the handwriting clearly was on the wall that plenty of worldwide dissent would arise over such a choice, and that the Chinese government would attempt for the Olympics to be a splendid way to try to whitewash its abysmal human rights situation today (see here, too) and in the recent past, including the Tiananmen Square massacre and the subsequent and ongoing crackdown related thereto. The recent and ongoing protests (where some or many demonstrators have gone beyond peaceful means, at least as to property destruction, and possibly worse) inside and outside of Tibet against Chinese oppression of Tibetans -- including the expectedly harsh response from the Chinese government -- are just one of the reasons to consider not watching the Chinese Olympics live or on television. To do otherwise will be to give up the opportunity to take a clear stand against human-rights-violating business as usual in China, when already few people vote with their wallets against such abuses by boycotting Chinese-made products. I do not advocate having government bans on Olympics participation, as such bans are their own form of government oppression against people's freedom of choice, and take the choice away from Olympic athletes (and some top Olympics athletes are considering boycotting the Olympics) whether or not to go to China. By the same token, those strongly opposed to China's miserable human rights situation (I have blogged about the United States' miserable human rights situation many times, too, although China's is much worse), need not contribute to China's attempted public relations coup through its Olympics; all that is needed is to turn off the Olympics television coverage and to not attend the stadium events. As a result, the Chinese government and the rest of the public will recognize that the Chinese government's Olympics propaganda machine wears no clothes. Also, when people refuse to watch the Chinese Olympics, that will be publicized in the Nielsen ratings, and television advertisers will recognize that they are paying too much money for commercials during Olympics airtime. Before the recent unrest in Tibet, the Associated Press reported that "Members of Congress said [February 27, 2008] they want China held to account for promises to protect human rights, press freedom and the environment that were made when Beijing was awarded the 2008 Olympics... Many lawmakers appeared deeply skeptical that China's pledges were sincere or that changes would last beyond the Olympics." China continues being a severe censor, even to the point of requiring that any Harry Connick, Jr., concerts cover the songs on the playlist submitted by his promoters, and banning the Rolling Stones from singing "Honky Tonk Woman" and "Let's Spend the Night Together." China has also blocked YouTube, which has included broadcasts (e.g., here and here) of the Tibetan unrest. YouTube's owner Google.com says it's trying to get YouTube's access returned in China, and the question remains whether that will be done with or without Google's previous complicity with brutality and whitewashed information from the Chinese regime. If the Chinese government really believes its hands are clean (which they clearly are not) during the current demonstrations, then why are foreign journalists barred from the capital city Lhasa? (See filmmaker Spence Palermo's account of the banishment of foreign reporters.) Will you be watching the Chinese Olympics? Jon Katz. ADDENDUM: Here are some additional newlinks; China's current ban on foreign journalists' access to Tibet makes it hard to have an accurate picture of what is currently happening in Tibet: - The Australian Herald-Sun reports on March 17, 2008: "At least seven Tibetans were killed as police opened fire overnight on an anti-China protest in the south-west of the country, two activist groups said, citing witness reports." - This New York Times March 15 report covers the overall situation in Lhasa and beyond, including allegations that vandalism in Tibet was directed at Chinese-owned property, and allegations by a Chinese resident of Tibet that his family members told him of Tibetans beating Chinese residents. - The International Campaign for Tibet has periodic updates on the situation in Tibet. - This BBC report suggests that many Chinese officials were surprised about the current extent of international outcries over China's human rights situation as the Olympics approach, which apparently included Steven Spielberg's withdrawal from a project to cover the Olympics there. Consequently, this is all the more reason to refuse to attend and watch the Chinese Olympics.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00