

Parade of Politics

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The Olympics are one of those wonderfully rare occasions when almost 200 countries put their differences aside and unite as citizens of the world to support their representative countries in healthy competition and in the spirit of sportsmanship.

By: Nicole Sadighi*

Watching the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony you can sense the electrifying atmosphere filled with patriotic passion and the thrill of exciting fanfare as you are consumed by an atmosphere of colors, music and dancing. Each marching nations' teams were full of pride and heads held high, clutching their elevated flags for the world to see, accompanied by wall-to-wall ovations and roaring cheers.

Thunderous cheer after thunderous cheer, team nations waved back in response as they marched one after the other. Iraq was also pleased to receive a supportive hurrah. Then enter center stage, its neighboring country following on close behind, team Iran and, by a striking contrast one could hear a palpable, heaving and very deliberate boo targeted at the Iranian delegation followed by the commentator's remark: "Quite a controversial welcome for the Iranians." For a couple of moments the dazzling parade turned into a damp squib.

It is notable to add that Pakistan was also booed, and the

United States and Taiwan were given a standing ovation. Despite the fact that Russia had invaded Georgia just that day, it too had received applause, but that could be because the news had not quite reached the Olympic audience yet.

This very live vocalized public opinion, however untimely or

inappropriate, should not go unnoticed. These events are very significant and give us a taste of the international atmosphere without the reliance on media or opinion polling firms. This famously celebrated occasion is attended by thousands of people of different nation states who in effect are the true ambassadors of their sovereign nations and thus illustrate their countries' mood and opinions. By gauging the reactions of the crowds of various nations and considering their political memberships in the world, the Olympic parades actually give us a good insight into international feelings and attitudes.

The People Responsible

Witnessing the televised negative tone of the crowds for team Iran, one could see the stunned looks on the Iranian athletes' faces, something they probably did not expect, considering this unique event's symbolism and message. Yet, they gallantly marched on forward with smiles.

Really it is neither the



crowds fault for the jeering nor the athletes fault for having to be at the receiving end of such disdain as they are merely professionals who have qualified to compete.

The true cause of these unenthusiastic feelings is the responsibility of the government officials of the Islamic Republic in Iran and thus any such feelings should be intended at them. Due to the entire political fracas they have caused since their inception, Iran now has an embarrassing political standing in the international community which has nothing to do with its citizens.

These Iranian athletes; who have earned their places and trained hard for years to get to this moment, where so many others can only dream of, had fallen victims to humiliation before the games had even begun! They were left to salvage what dignity they had as true Persians by continuing as professional athletes, at the same time hoping to reclaim some respect through their performances, even perhaps succeeding in a little public relation on behalf of their nation.

Just to add further shame to team Iran, swimmer Mohammad Ali Rezaei was forced not to compete by Iranian officials because he would be competing alongside Israeli Tom Be'eri. He was also warned that if he did not comply he would face hanging upon his return to Iran.

This has not been the first time that the Islamic Republic in Iran

has ordered its athletes to pull out of Olympic competitions that include competing alongside an Israeli opponent. An Iranian Judoka was also forced to pull out of the 2004 Olympics because of an Israeli contender. The Olympic Games do not allow race, creed or color to interfere in sport but each time Iranian officials have fabricated some kind of excuse such as poor health.

Iran has refused to recognize Israel's right to exist since the Islamic fundamentalists toppled the Shah in 1979. In fact Tehran had been nominated for the 1984 summer Olympics, but due to the 1979 revolution they were held in Los Angeles. Pre-Islamic revolution, Iran had a pre-eminent status in the world not only with America and the west but also its neighboring countries. In those days it was considered safe to hold the Olympics in the rich cultural land of Tehran with no fear of anti-Semitism or hatred.

Today, the tone is quite the opposite. The occasion has given a platform for people to show their true feelings, from the street protests against the Chinese Government to the cheering and the jeering of the international Olympic audience, this has proven to be an excellent barometer of international mood.

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