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Turin's Take At the Winter Olympics: From Re-Branding A City to Reducing International Tension

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by Shawn Powers

The Olympics have historically offered nations and communities the opportunity to host and entertain thousands of athletes, media personalities and tourists from around the world, presenting host states unprecedented prospects for interacting and engaging with foreign peoples and to showcase their respective culture, talent, and character on a global stage. Moreover, the Olympics often provide a key impetus to revitalize and even revolutionize the host city, facilitating the rejuvenation of local economies and the construction of state-of-the art facilities that can change a city's culture and image for decades into the future.

Political pundits and media commentators heralded the February 2006 winter Olympics in Turin, Italy as the least controversial international events in recent memory. However, as with many Olympics prior, the Torino games helped to reframe the image of a small European community and invited both failed and successful attempts by countries around the world to use the Olympics as both a platform to prove their excellence in sports and to demonstrate their importance in the international political arena.

Prior to February 2006, as a small city in northern Italy, Turin was known primarily for its industrial capacity, an increasingly less marketable feature amidst the backdrop of the rapid economic transformations of the 21st century. In preparation for the Olympics, Turin undertook significant efforts to improve its infrastructure and ready the city for international scrutiny, even going so far as to change the pronunciation of the city's name. While Italians continue to debate the relative utility of the massive Olympic expenditures on an aging and relatively economically marginal area of the country, it is clear that Turin has transformed itself into a city that will attract global attention for years to come.

While the 2006 Olympics were critical for re-branding Torino's image from an aging industrial city to a vacation destination for international visitors, the games also played an important role in reformulating and/or reinforcing the images of several participating countries. While some relentlessly American-centered media coverage was rebroadcast around the world and the self-promotional attitudes of athletes such as Bode Miller helped strengthen impressions of American arrogance, the Chinese expanded their Olympic presence to a number of new sporting areas.

The Danish publication of political cartoons insulting to the Muslim prophet Mohammed also cast a harsh shadow over the games. Many feared that cartoon protestors would use the games as a venue for possibly violent protest. This fear was so pronounced that several Danish athletes decided to opt out of the games entirely. The absence of any real fractious political protest during the games has been

attributed by many to the spirit of international cooperation and gamesmanship that permeated the event as well as to Turin's robust security infrastructure. Indeed, the absence of protest and controversy may well have been the most important story emerging out of this year's Olympics.

This special report provides an overview of the journalistic coverage discussing this winter's Olympic Games. If you would like to post your ideas and reactions to this report, you can add your comments at the bottom of this page.

Italy's Detroit is trying to transform itself into a winter tourist destination: Lacking passion, but ready to party

(Randy Harvey, *The Baltimore Sun*, Feb 10th, 2006)

For decades, Turin has served as one of Italy's foremost industrial centers while more appealing and historic cities such as Rome, Milan, Florence and Venice have attracted most of the international tourists. Today, with carmaker Fiat, the company that drove the city's economy, having trimmed operations and moved to the suburbs, Turin is attempting to transform itself into a winter tourist destination, taking advantage of its location at the foot of the Italian Alps. The city's efforts will receive their largest boost - and test - with the staging of the Olympic Winter Games, starting tonight with the opening ceremony before a capacity crowd of 35,000 at the Olympic Stadium and a worldwide television audience.

Turin's 'cultural Olympics'

(Bill Pennington, *The New York Times*, Jan 18th, 2005)

The Olympic movement needs something old - a simple, scandal-free Olympic Games - and it needs something new - an Olympic Games with sold-out arenas and a modern buzz. Turin, steeped in the layers of its 2,000-year history and attempting to transform itself once again, aims to be the place. It is the essence of Turin's Olympic mission. "We have something to offer the identity and image of the Olympics, and that is an Olympic Games imbedded in the Italian culture," Valentino Castellani, president of the Turin Organizing Committee, said. "Past Olympics may have been too focused on the athletic competition and not enough on a cultural Olympics.

Games showed our best, worst

(Chuck Raasch, *The Times Union*, March 5th, 2006)

Accessed via LexisNexis

At the 2006 Winter Olympics, we were reminded once again of the confluence of sports and politics. Such moments can be powerfully symbolic. The American Jesse Owens' spectacular performance in the 1936 Berlin Olympics humbled the Nazis on their turf three years before Hitler launched World War II. But reality confronted this black American hero when he returned home to segregation and second-class citizenship. The 1980 "Miracle on Ice" - the underdog American Olympic ice hockey team's victory over the Soviet Union's seemingly unbeatable squad - remains an iconic moment in the Cold War. And as sports has become big business, inextricable to the culture at large, American politics has attempted to attach itself to sports' influence. Recent presidents, especially George W. Bush, have reveled in inviting national champions to the White House. Big events, such as NASCAR races, attract politicians trying to connect with everyday lives.

Millions of dollars in funding, a craving for glory and a sporting machine that spits out Olympic medal winners is China's recipe for success

(Peter Goff, *South China Morning Post*, March 5th, 2006)

Accessed via LexisNexis

How did it come to pass? When China emerged from the mad Mao era a few decades ago they were sporting lightweights, but today they are a powerhouse that produces battalions of Olympic medal winners. In Athens they were second only to the United States in terms of gold medals collected, and some predict they will take the number one slot by the time the games come to Beijing. It's a curious phenomenon in a country without a strong sporting culture. They have developed a knack of producing champions in sports that they have absolutely no tradition in. You sit on a beach in Brazil and watch how the kids control a football and you can see how that nation churns out World Cup-winning teams. But in China, at the grassroots level, there is no strong amateur sporting culture, and it seems most kids would rather spend their spare time playing video games or shopping than shooting hoops or plunging in a pool. Yet an ever-increasing number of their athletes are finding ways to the podium. So what is China's secret recipe?

Danes skipping events over Muslim outrage: Table tennis team cancels trip because of rioting over Muhammad cartoons

(*MSNBC*, Feb 7th, 2006)

Denmark's table tennis team canceled a trip to the Middle East this month because of Islamic outrage over Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Denmark will take part in the Turin Olympics, which begin Friday, but its soccer federation is considering calling off an exhibition game in Israel on March 1. The Danish soccer federation said it was in contact with the country's Foreign Ministry and intelligence service and will decide this month if it will cancel the game in Tel Aviv. The Foreign Ministry has urged Danes to avoid Muslim countries because of violent protests against Denmark.

Turin's Muslims Try to Keep a Low Profile: Some would protest the prophet cartoons but dare not, citing a fear of deportation. But others are using the Olympic Games to make a point

(Tracy Wilkinson, *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 11, 2006)

Demonstrators sang protest songs, played drums that have come to symbolize the worldwide anti-globalization movement, waved Palestinian and Iraqi flags and burned a paper American flag. A huge red banner hung from the facade of the six-story university building proclaiming "Conflict lives here" -- a play on the Olympics 2006 motto, "Passion lives here." Another banner declared: "Laura Bush, go home!" The first lady, who is heading the U.S. delegation to Turin, is scheduled to visit another part of the university today. More than 15,000 police officers and army troops, backed by NATO surveillance aircraft and an undisclosed number of Italian and foreign undercover agents, are patrolling Turin and the surrounding Alpine hills and valleys where the Olympics will unfold over the next two weeks.

Turin Muslims Part of Olympic Experience

(Brian Padden, *Voice of America News*, Feb 21st, 2006)

As in many parts of the world, the controversy over recent cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad has reached Italy. An Italian cabinet minister resigned after angering Muslims by wearing a T-shirt

decorated with the controversial cartoons. In response, protesters in Libya burned an Italian consulate, and 10 of them were killed by police. But in Turin, Italy, the site of the Winter Olympics, there have been no demonstrations. As one Islamic leader tells VOA's Brian Padden, that is because the Muslim community in Turin wants the Olympics to succeed. Many Muslims immigrants in Turin, Italy live and work in the city center close to some of the Olympic venues. Like Muslims around the world, they are upset and angry over the controversial cartoons using the image of the Prophet Mohammed.

Italy keeps protesters out of world's view; Anti-railroad group gets special care

(Kevin Johnson, *USA Today*, Feb 23rd, 2006)

Now the uneasy standoff in the shadow of spectacular snow-capped peaks is more emblematic of the Italian government's unyielding effort to keep the Games free of potential disruption. "Nothing happens now with all this attention here," said Mario Prati, 31, a local chemist, nodding to the dark blue police cars parked out front. "We feel a tight control that is not normal in our valley," said Florenzo Giacometti, 55, a mechanic and regular NO-TAV visitor. "Ah, the lovely Carabinieri." The Carabinieri is part of an army that has been deployed across the Olympics' far-flung venues, from Piazza Castello in downtown Torino to the bobsled run in scenic Cesana Pariol. There are more than 10,000 security forces in the Torino area.

Olympic pulse is faint in the heart of Turin: Surrounded by piazzas, arches, cafes and red wine, who can find excitement for medal platforms?

(Jim Souhan, *Star Tribune*, Feb 11th, 2006)

This is what you imagine Italy to be - cappuccino, gelato and red wine on every corner, amid columns, arches and marble sidewalks, under glittering lights that obscure a bright moon. Down the avenue from the Piazza Castello, an intact castle fills a huge square, providing dramatic backdrop for the medal ceremonies platform. Far from the hastily constructed (or half-finished and hastily camouflaged) media condos, you find a wonderful place, but there is no guarantee this will be a wonderful Olympics. Three times the route of the Olympic flame was altered to avoid protesters angry about everything from globalization to Olympic sponsors that have built engines used to wage war in Iraq. The Italian Interior Ministry has worried about violence in the wake of Muslim protests against the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed that were published in Europe, and about "subversive" Italian groups. There is no snow in town and no new snow in the mountains, and the potential for logistical nightmares on the narrow roads that cut through the Alps is apparent.

Turin's Muslims in Games' shadow

(Sandro Contenta, *Toronto Star*, Feb 17th, 2006)

"I know there has to be security during the Olympics, but they are putting too much pressure on us - too much," said Karroui, 42, who arrived from Morocco 16 years ago. "The Olympics has made life much more difficult for us. We can't walk around without being stopped by police," he said yesterday, working his stand within sight of a group of police officers eyeing a market with about 150 Muslim merchants. Karroui's complaint is heard widely among Turin's estimated 30,000 Muslims, most of them from Morocco. For them, the experience of the 20th Winter Olympics has been somewhat less festive than for most residents and tourists. Community leaders say the increased surveillance results in immigrants being given 15 days to leave the county when stopped without the proper visas. They

don't know how many have been caught but insist they are far more often workers supporting families back home than troublemakers.

Turin braces for onslaught

(*The Australian*, Feb 10th, 2006)

Italy has already had to apologise to the International Olympic Committee for repeated attempts to hijack or extinguish the Olympic torch on its way to the Winter Games -- and that is even before the opening ceremony in Turin tonight. The authorities are bracing for demonstrations over the next two weeks against everything from unemployment and globalisation to the presence of Laura Bush and Coca-Cola's sponsorship. The fear of terrorist attacks in a country that has troops in Iraq has been compounded by Islamic fury over the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. On top of that, local residents are enraged by plans to run a high-speed railway through the nearby Val di Susa, where several events are being staged. In response, the Government has mounted a massive security operation to guard the one million spectators from 45 countries, 2600 competitors and at least 15 heads of government or state that are expected to attend the Games.

Dangerous Games

(Jennifer Lind, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mar 2006)

Taiwan nationalists recognize that the Chinese have a lot at stake in the games. Just as Japan and South Korea (hosts in 1964 and 1988, respectively) viewed their Olympics as emblematic of their national achievement, so Beijing sees the 2008 games as an opportunity to demonstrate that it has moved emphatically beyond developing-country status into the ranks of the world's greatest nations. China's aggressive quest for a higher medal total reveals how much importance the country puts on the Olympics. (Taipei, meanwhile, is considering the idea of hosting a future Olympics. Premier Frank Hsieh has proposed a campaign to host the 2020 games, arguing that it would boost global recognition of Taiwan. Advocates also argue that hosting the Olympics would bolster Taiwanese security, because Beijing would not dare attack the island in the preceding years.)

China would like the world to see its best behavior; Politeness campaign aims to get people to quit the spitting and shoving before Olympics

(Calum MacLeod, *USA Today*, Feb 9th, 2006)

Iconic Olympic venues are sprouting all over the Chinese capital. The national stadium is being woven in concrete and steel to resemble a bird's nest. The "water cube" swimming center will soon be a giant box of blue bubbles. Communist planners are making China's dowdy, gray capital beautiful for the 2008 Summer Games. Now comes a bigger challenge: Can they make it polite, too? That might be one hurdle too many, says the woman whose job is to convince Beijingers that common sights here -- spitting, swearing, belching and cutting in line -- are no way to welcome the world. "Building the stadiums is no problem," sighs Zhang Huigang, director of Beijing's Capital Ethics Development Office. "But raising people's quality and civilization is not something we can do in one or two months, or even one or two years."

Host city hopes Games recast its image; Torino officials think new look will boost business, tourism

(Kevin Johnson, *USA Today*, Feb 17th, 2006)
Available via Lexis Nexis

But Torino's government and business leaders said the city, like other Olympic hosts, is banking on the Games to take Torino back to the time when the former national capital once reigned as a cultural and intellectual hub. In Torino's future, authorities see a more attractive base for cleaner technology. They also envision a tourist mecca that would finally marry its historic center -- and all of its elegant cafes and museums -- with the rustic Alps. "When people think about northern Italy, they think Milan," said Cosmo Perrello, a manager of the Amadeus Hotel, a 26-room local fixture just off the grand Piazza Vittorio Veneto. "Torino has been a last stop in Italy. It has always been a town of working people. We hope now that it will become a first stop for Italy." The city's share of the \$3.5 billion cost to host the Games is nearly \$300 million. When the event is over, Mayor Sergio Chiamparino said, the city expects to lose at least \$47 million. But Chiamparino said the loss is a relatively small price to pay for an investment he hopes will pay dividends for the region far into the future.

Turin Wonders Whether Games' Glow Will Last (Tracy Wilkinson, *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 27, 2006)

The famously sullen residents of Turin said farewell to the Winter Olympics on Sunday, worried about the huge amount of money spent but savoring a new liveliness in a city not known for spirit or emotion. Turin officials pronounced themselves satisfied with their handling of the Winter Games, but braced for what is often called the Olympic Hangover. City boosters had a lot riding on these Games: They desperately hoped the \$3.4 billion they invested in the spectacle would put Turin on the map and seal its transformation from a gray postindustrial city that had fallen on hard times to a modern, vital destination. "Stereotypes are very hard to fight, but I think we showed this time that we can fight the stereotypes and win," said Anna Martina, a city official and liaison to the Olympics.

UN and Olympic chiefs pledge to use sports against war (*Agence France Presse*, Accessible via the *Daily Times*, Jan 24th, 2006)

The United Nations and the International Olympic Committee pledged Tuesday to expand their work together to use sports as a tool to promote peace in war torn areas and combat poverty. The IOC and UN revealed they were studying a plan to actively promote sporting activities in areas controlled by UN peacekeepers, in an attempt to bringing divided communities together. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan renewed his support for the Olympic truce after a meeting with IOC president Jacques Rogge, less than three weeks before the Winter Games kick off in Turin.

The Promise of the Olympics (*The Capital Times*, Feb 10th, 2006)

When the historic games were held in Olympia, the Greeks declared a truce before each competition so that athletes and spectators could travel safely from the far corners of the world to join in what was referred to as "ekecheiria" -- literally, the "holding of hands." During the period of the ancient truces, wars were suspended, armies were prohibited from entering the region in which the competitions took place or from threatening the Games in any way, legal disputes were put on hold, and executions were forbidden. That ideal was reflected this week in the traditional call by United Nations officials for an

Olympic Truce, in which Annan declared that "the Olympic movement and the United Nations share fundamental ideals: tolerance and understanding; equal opportunities and fair play; and, most of all, peace. In a world growing ever closer and more interconnected, and yet still riven by brutal conflict, dire poverty and cruel injustice, it is more important than ever that we all join forces to give life to those ideals."

A grand opening: Warmed by the ideals of peace and harmony, the games begin

(John Jeansonne, *Newsday*, Feb 11th, 2006)

But Friday night was for Italy and Turin to strut their history, energy and style and put their face on the first winter games to be contested in this country since the 1956 Olympics at Cortina d'Ampezzo. The show went from Dante to Armani, from the Renaissance to a Formula-1 race car. And the night was for diplomacy. First lady Laura Bush was among the dignitaries in attendance, and all of the athletes' delegations were greeted warmly during the Parade of Nations, including the Danes, whose country has experienced a week of crisis with the Islamic world. As a precautionary move, three plain-clothed guards followed the Danes into the stadium. Touching a common Olympic theme, organizers made a pitch for peace by trotting out surprise guests Yoko Ono and Peter Gabriel, with Gabriel singing John Lennon's "Imagine."

Missing golden chance to change a bad image

(Steve DeShazo, *The Free-Lance Star*, Feb 27th, 2006)

IT'S AN UNDERSTATEMENT to say that Americans' international popularity isn't exactly at an all-time high. And the Winter Olympics did absolutely nothing to change that impression. OK, maybe Lindsey Kildow and Joey Cheek did. Anyone with the courage to get back on skis after the frightening fall she took deserves admiration, regardless of race, creed or nationality. The fact that she didn't win a medal matters not in the least. Otherwise, the U.S. spent an eminently forgettable fortnight demonstrating that the Olympics have become as much about ego and greed as about competition and sportsmanship. And the image of the Ugly Americans only got reinforced.

Turin's Olympics Will Be in 'Torino' (Think Cappuccino...)

(Stefan Fatsis and Alessandra Galloni, *Wall Street Journal*, Dec 8, 2005)

"I'm convinced that part of the reason people love cappuccino is for the joy of pronouncing the word," says Beppe Severgnini, a columnist for Italian daily newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*. "The word Torino is less sexy, but it's better than Turin." Once the manufacturing heart of Italy, Turin has been mired in a long decline that has shut down its factories and has shrunk its population by a quarter, to about 870,000. Recent financial problems at Fiat SpA have further tarnished Turin's image abroad. Officials hope the Olympics can transform the northern city, neighbor to Italy's fashion capital, Milan, into a center for Italian architecture and design a short drive from Alpine resorts.

Branding the Games Italian

(Sue Garibaldi, *Communication Arts*, Jan/Feb, 2006)

Successfully branding the Olympics is one of the most comprehensive design projects imaginable, with thousands of components that come together to ensure an integrated message during a global

broadcast. Iconologic is leading the design development for Torino's Look of the Games--something that no other company outside the host country has ever done.

Olympics, not U.N. show global democracy

(Munim Deen, *OU Daily*, Feb 15, 2006)

Any athlete who meets the qualification standards can represent his or her nation. Thus, in this year's games, athletes from such unlikely nations as India, Venezuela and even the Saharan nation of Algeria are competing with the rest of the world's best as equals. If only our diplomatic institutions were as successful. The United Nations is quite similar to the Olympics in its professed spirit of equality. During its heyday in the Cold War, the U.N. was seen as the bastion of diplomatic equality: a global check against the spread of tyranny by any means.