



## Original Research

# Olympic Neutrality and Norm Emergence in International Sport: A Long-Term Perspective

Leo Goretti, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

**Received:** 05/14/2024; **Accepted:** 08/05/2024; **Published:** 09/18/2024

**Abstract:** The idea that sport is a separate domain that must be sheltered away not just from political interference but also from any kind of political issues, has almost become self-evident, to the point that sport's neutrality seems just natural to many—a founding pillar of Olympism since its inception. This article adopts the opposite assumption: that international sport has been an integral part of the international system since its origins. Analyzing international sport as an institution, it interrogates the process and rationale that have led to the emergence of neutrality as one of its underlying norms, focusing on how wider developments in the international system steered this process. Relatedly, it discusses the specific function that neutrality has played within the wider normative framework of international sport and makes some final considerations as to why this has become especially salient in recent years.

**Keywords:** *Sport, Olympism, International Olympic Committee, Institutionalism, Norms*

## Introduction

“We must be even more united and even more vigilant to protect...our unifying mission of sport in general and how to protect our autonomy and political neutrality”: it was thus that the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Thomas Bach, introduced the report on the activities of the Committee’s administration at the 141st IOC session in Mumbai on October 15, 2023 (IOC Media 2023, 2:15:21–2:15:49). Held more than a year-and-a-half into the Russia–Ukraine war and just a week after Hamas’s murderous attacks on Israel, uneasy questions about the positioning of international sport and its organizations vis-à-vis sheer geopolitical tensions lingered over the meeting. Looking toward the Paris 2024 Olympics, with the issue of the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the event still unresolved, Bach seemed at pains to reassert the neutrality and “unifying power” of the Olympic movement against “all these dividing and divisive forces in the world” (IOC Media 2023, 54:47–55:15).

The narrative about Olympic—and more generally sport’s—neutrality is nothing new per se. The idea that sport is a separate domain that must be sheltered away not just from political interferences but also from any kind of political issues has almost become self-evident: as the old adage goes, sport and politics do not mix. As a result, sport’s neutrality seems just natural to many—a founding pillar of Olympism since its inception. Neutrality is

portrayed as a *principled* stance that would somehow position the international sporting movement—and its governing organizations—above the troubled waters of societal divisions and international politics.<sup>1</sup>

This article adopts the opposite assumption, namely, that international sport is—and has been since its origins—an integral part of the international system. Analyzing international sport as an institution, it interrogates the process and rationale that have led to the emergence of neutrality as one of its underlying norms, focusing on how wider, exogenous developments in the international system impacted on it. Relatedly, it discusses the specific function that neutrality has played within the wider normative framework of international sport and presents some final considerations as to why this has become especially salient in recent years. Methodologically, the principal source of this investigation is the official statutes of the Olympic movement (what is today known as the Olympic Charter), analyzed through a qualitative approach and complemented with other primary sources and insights from the scholarly literature.

## **International Sport as an Institution: A Conceptual Framework**

Apart from a handful of pioneering works, sport was long neglected in international relations (IR), especially in comparison with the thriving literature in the history and sociology fields since the 1970s to 1980s (Budd and Levermore 2004). However, in the last two decades, a substantial IR scholarship has emerged, focusing especially on the notions of sports diplomacy—that is, the contribution that international sport can provide for diplomatic ends (Dichter 2021)—the use of sport for soft (and great) power purposes (Grix and Houlihan 2014; Nygård and Gates 2013), as well as the politics (and political economy) of mega-sport events (Cornelissen 2013) and contestation *in* and *through* international sport (Diodato and Strina 2023). A notable contribution was provided by Murray (2018, 135), who highlighted the existence of an “evident, tangible and growing...international society of sport.”

This article proposes a different yet complementary approach. The basic assumption is that sport can be meaningfully analyzed as an institution, whereby an institution is here defined as a “system of established principles, norms, and rules, identifiable in space and time, that structure repeated human interaction.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, international sport is regarded as an institution of the international system, more specifically, as a *secondary* institution, as defined by Spandler (2015, 613): that is, one that—unlike the more fundamental and overarching primary institutions underlying the international system (such as state sovereignty or multilateralism)—refers to a “discrete sectio[n] of international reality and appl[ies] to a clearly defined set of actors.” Indeed, not only does international sport embrace a defined and discrete sub-set of actors acting in the international reality (international non-

---

<sup>1</sup> For a critique of the moral underpinnings of sport’s neutrality, see Næss (2018, 2022, esp. chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> This definition draws on Keohane (1988) and Hodgson (2006).

governmental organizations, their national branches, highly specialized individuals, and even its own judicial system), but its very functioning is dependent on the presence of some kind of international society of states and its primary institutions: this is evident both from the criteria of participation in international sport (which are often *de facto*, not *de jure*, nation-based) and from the fact that in the presence of major events threatening the foundations of the international system (such as world wars), international sport comes to a halt.

A related assumption is that international sport, as all institutions, is the product of a non-linear historical process through which its principles, norms and rules, as well as its governing organizations, emerged (on norm emergence see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). This process—and its twists and turns—can only be fully understood if the wider developments in the international system are taken into account along with the way in which they impacted—directly or indirectly—on international sport (and vice versa). In other words, major changes in international politics—that is, in the way in which power is formally and informally created, organized, managed, negotiated, and contested in the international system—are also likely to have an effect in the domain of international sport.

This framework can be applied to understand the evolution of international sport since the late nineteenth century. Today, international sport is governed by a host of highly structured international non-governmental organizations, chiefly, the IOC, established in Paris in 1894, and the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), created ten years later in Paris.<sup>3</sup> As will be highlighted in what follows, it took several decades (arguably, up to the post-WW2 period) for the IOC to assert unequivocally its governing role over international sport (see also Chappelet 2024). In parallel, both as a governing and as a legitimation tool, the Committee developed a number of fundamental principles, norms, and rules, which came to form the overarching ideational system known as “Olympism.” These were enshrined into the IOC’s statutes, or what is today called the Olympic Charter, “a basic instrument of a constitutional nature,” which “sets forth and recalls the Fundamental Principles and essential values of Olympism” (IOC 2023, 6).

Among the fundamental principles of Olympism, the obligation for sports organizations to “apply political neutrality” is currently formalized in Principle 5 of the Charter (IOC 2023, 8). Unlike what is commonly believed, however, the present codification of this norm is just a recent development, first introduced in 2018; in the past, different formulations referring in a direct or indirect way to the political neutrality of sport appeared—and disappeared—several times in the Olympic Charter, in correspondence with wider developments in the international system.

Building on previous studies on the relationship between sport and politics (see especially Boykoff 2017; Krieger 2022; Del Bò and Bastianon 2023), this article tries to trace

---

<sup>3</sup> Due to this author’s expertise and space constraints, the issue of “neutrality” within FIFA is outside the scope of this analysis; for some apt considerations, see Belcastro (2023).

the process and investigate the rationale behind the emergence of neutrality as a norm of the Olympic movement from a long-term perspective. To this end, it offers a qualitative analysis of all the different versions of the Olympic Charter from 1908 up to today, as made available in the digital collection of the Olympic World Library.<sup>4</sup> The focus is on explicit occurrences of terms referring to “politics” (“politic\*”) and “neutrality” (“neutral\*”), but the overall discourse adopted in the various manifestations of the document—especially the sections outlining the fundamental principles of Olympism—will be taken into consideration as a contextual frame. Given the limited number of documents available for the early decades of the movement, the analysis of the pre-World War II period will be complemented by a similar study conducted on the *Selected Writings* of Pierre de Coubertin (2000), the architect of modern Olympism.

Increased or decreased emphasis on neutrality and the sport–politics nexus is then interpreted against the wider developments in the international system. Through a number of exploratory observations based on historical process–tracing as well as drawing on sports history scholarship, a possible causal mechanism of influence of international politics over the Olympic discourse is outlined.<sup>5</sup> Investigating the role of exogenous (i.e., pertaining to the realm of international politics) factors in the process of norm emergence in sport from a long-term perspective, this approach contributes to shedding light on the reasons for today’s increased relevance of the sport–politics nexus and the norm of neutrality within the Olympic movement.

## Olympic Neutrality from Coubertin to WWII

Inspired by the Swiss example, neutrality is often regarded as a fundamental principle of the Olympic movement since its early years. As Tomlinson (2005) pointed out, in his writings, Coubertin repeatedly praised Switzerland’s unique model of democracy—and neutrality. His choice to relocate the IOC’s headquarters to Lausanne, in April 1915, was certainly linked to Switzerland’s standing as “a country respected far and wide for its political neutrality,” as noted on the IOC (2024a) website. Yet it was not a foundational choice: originally, as de Coubertin (2000, 465) recalled, a “custom” had been in place according to which, in principle, “the registered office” of the IOC was supposed to be transferred “every four years

---

<sup>4</sup> The expression “Olympic Charter” was adopted only in 1978; thereafter, thirty-eight successively amended versions of the Charter have been published at the time of writing (May 2024). Additionally, the IOC recognizes another thirty-eight documents—some in French only—published since 1908, including statutes and regulations of various kinds, as previous manifestations of the Charter. For the full list, see [https://library.olympics.com/default/olympic-charter.aspx?\\_lg=en-GB-](https://library.olympics.com/default/olympic-charter.aspx?_lg=en-GB-). For this research, when a document was available both in English and in French, the English version was analyzed.

<sup>5</sup> The causality nexus may be fruitfully explored through systematic archival research focusing on the internal documents produced by the IOC in correspondence with each relevant update of the Charter. In the context of this study, due to material constraints, this exploration has been possible only in those instances for which there are digitalized primary sources available.

to the country where the next Olympiad was to be held”—although this had rarely happened in practice. While Coubertin had already thought about changing this rule to provide “administrative stability” to the movement, the “objections” within the IOC were won only “in view of the seriousness of the circumstances” in 1915. Indeed, since the next Games were still formally assigned to Berlin, according to the old custom, the German city could have claimed the right to host the Committee while World War I was raging (de Coubertin 2000; see also Kluge 2014, 14). Thus, the IOC’s decision to turn Lausanne, in neutral Switzerland, into the “world administrative center...of modern Olympism” was facilitated by an exogenous factor: the outbreak of a major war in Europe.

Indeed, explicit references to the notion of neutrality—as well as to politics in general—are absent in the early official documents of the Olympic movement. The IOC “regulations,” first published in 1908, opened with a section on its “objects” that generically mentioned the “high ideals” by which Olympism was inspired, without clarifying what these were. A more pressing concern was reasserting the governing role of the IOC not only in “ensur[ing] the regular celebration of the Games,” but, more widely, in “tak[ing] all proper measures to conduct modern athletics in the right way” (IOC 1908, 7; see English translation in IOC 1930, 19). This overarching formulation would remain the same in the Olympic statutes up to 1949, while the different versions of the Charter were progressively expanded, for example, by adding a section on “fundamental principles” in 1938 (Internationales Olympisches Institut 1938, 45).<sup>6</sup>

Neutrality is rarely mentioned in Coubertin’s own writings too—and when it is, it often does not refer to the interstate dimension. This is the case, for example, for his considerations about the fact that any religious service held before the start of the Games should be “sufficiently neutral in character to rise above all differences in doctrine” (de Coubertin 2000, 474) or that neutrality should be applied by the IOC vis-à-vis national federations in the process, leading to “the rational unification of the rules of play and competition” (de Coubertin 2000, 664).

A more recurrent term is instead “peace,” often linked with the notion of so-called athletic “internationalism”: the idea that by “bring[ing] the youth of all countries periodically together for amicable trials of muscular strength and agility,” the Olympic games may be “a potent, if indirect, factor in securing universal peace” (de Coubertin 2000, 360). Remarkably, Coubertin was not a pacifist; his idea of the Olympics as a muscular but fair contest between nations that could also be conducive to peace was rather the result of a complex background combining cosmopolitanism and nationalism that was common to many “idealistic internationalist” movements of the late nineteenth century (Hoberman 1995, 6–15). Significantly, Coubertin did not write only about *international* peace but also—and quite

---

<sup>6</sup> Notably, this section initially did not focus on values but rather outlined the basic functioning of the Olympic Games (for example, that they are celebrated every four years and that they were open to amateurs only).

frequently—about “social peace”. In his view, spreading the “pleasure” of sport among the “lower middle classes” and the “adolescent proletariat” would greatly contribute to this end “by reason of it[s] potent physical and moral effects” (de Coubertin 2000, 172–173). In a world riven not only by war but also by social inequalities and conflicts, according to Coubertin, Olympism derived its power from “its most deeply human, and therefore universal, aspects” (de Coubertin 2000, 518).

This narrative, centered on universality, situated Olympic sport above any kind of divisions not only at the international but also at the *intrastate societal* level. To understand its rationale, one must consider the emergence of several alternative sporting movements in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries that were born out of class, religion, and gender cleavages: foremost among them was the workers’ sport movement (which was split into a socialist and a communist international organization in the 1920s–early 1930s) (Gounot 2015) and the women’s athletic movement, organized by the *Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale* (FSFI) since 1921 (Carpentier and Lefèvre 2006). These movements were present in numerous countries and organized their own international competitions (such as the International Workers’ Olympiads, the Spartakiads, and the Women’s Olympic Games), thus threatening the IOC’s claims of primacy over international sport. Against this backdrop, the Olympic movement staked its claim to be the only legitimate governing body of sport internationally by stressing its (alleged) universalism<sup>7</sup> (see also Chappelet 2024). Rather than on a functional norm such as neutrality, the emphasis in the Olympic discourse was placed on its fundamental and foundational values—the “universal and timeless” mission of Olympism (de Coubertin 2000, 595)—that were supposedly superseding those put forward by competing, “factional” movements. To be sure, as noted by MacAloon (2008, xxv), while Coubertin “act[ed] as if ideology and politics were mere epiphenomena to be ‘transcended’” within the Olympic movement (which was key to legitimizing it), his overall approach, behavior, and vision of Olympism were actually “eminently political,” having the ultimate goal of establishing, advancing, and protecting the leading role of the movement over international sport.

The IOC’s battle for organizational primacy lasted for at least three decades. In 1930, Coubertin—now Honorary President of the IOC but still “attentive[ly] involve[ed] in the ongoing growth of the Olympic movement” (Müller 2000, 47)—was still calling for a “sports reform” that included “the suppression of all world-wide Games which are merely useless repetitions of the Olympic Games and which have an Ethnical, Political or Religious character” (de Coubertin 2000, 237). Only during the 1930s did the IOC eventually

---

<sup>7</sup> Of course, in the early Olympic movement, this universalism was imbued with elitism and strong ethnocentrism, as it fundamentally revolved around an idea of Olympic athletes as middle-to-upper-class White men. Coubertin’s own attitude was paternalistic toward non-Western people (often commenting on their alleged “racial characteristics”) and exclusionary against women, whose participation in the Games he strongly opposed (Chatziefstathiou 2008).

consolidate its organizational monopoly over international sport. Such monopoly was established by loosening some boundaries and integrating in a subordinate position, without challenging the existing order, subjects that had previously been excluded, as was the case with women's sport (see Carpentier and Lefèvre 2006). On the other hand, it was facilitated by exogenous developments in international politics: above all, the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in Germany, which deprived the European workers' sport movement of its heartlands (Gounot 2015).

In parallel, the Olympic Games grew in significance as an arena for augmenting state prestige and status at the international level, as was evident at the 1936 Games. The Games had been awarded to Berlin in 1931. The Nazi takeover of power, in January 1933, initially created concerns within the IOC about the situation of the Jewish sportsmen and sportswomen in the country and, more generally, a Nazi politicization of the Games. In this context, a document issued by the IOC, in May 1933, clarified, for the first time, that "The National Olympic Committees, to fulfil their duty, must avoid any political or other influence" (IOC 1933, 12). These concerns were, however, quickly assuaged by the reassurances provided—admittedly "with the consent of his Government"—by the chairman of the German organizing committee that the IOC took at "face value," paving the way for the de facto Nazi control over the Games (Walters 2009, 33–39). Indeed, the Berlin Olympics are often described as a paradigmatic example of state (Nazi) propaganda through the Games. They were also, however, the first Olympics against which an international campaign of boycott based on political reasons was launched (Clay Large 2007). The impact of international politics on the Games was growing, as Coubertin himself acknowledged: writing about the "unfair campaign" that had been launched against the Berlin Olympics, he admitted that one could not expect Olympism to be "immune" from politics, although this was unlikely to corrupt the "soul" of the Olympic "institution" (de Coubertin 2000, 584).<sup>8</sup>

To conclude, in the late 1930s, the emerging challenge for the IOC was no longer to fend off competing events such as the Workers' or Women's Games but rather to minimize the risk that heightened international tensions that spilled over again into the Olympic movement, as had happened at the end of World War I. On that occasion, the IOC—which, as we have seen, had moved to neutral Switzerland but had not yet developed explicit regulations about neutrality and the sport–politics nexus—had yielded to pressure from the winners and had accepted the proposal to exclude the defeated powers from the 1920 and (limited to Germany) 1924 Olympics (Sbetti 2023). Introducing explicit regulations about the rejection of political interferences, as those outlined in the May 1933 document, could instead both provide an internal code of conduct to members of the Olympic movement and send a signal about the movement's positioning to external state actors—even though the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ironically, in May 1936, Coubertin was offered a secret donation of 10,000 *Reichsmarks* from the German organizing committee reportedly at the behest of Adolf Hitler (Walters 2009).

actual implications of such provisions were limited, as the Berlin Games demonstrated. After the tragic interruption of the Games due to the outbreak of World War II (WWII), the codification of norms and regulations to shield Olympism from international tensions resumed at an even greater pace in the post-war period, when new states and actors entered the Olympic arena.

## **Olympic “Non-Politicization” amid the Cold War**

In the early post-war years, the “non-political” nature of the Olympic movement was increasingly codified through official statements and regulations. In 1946, at the first post-war IOC session held in Lausanne, a resolution was adopted reaffirming the commitment to the “diffusion throughout the world” of “amateur sport...in its exclusion of any political and commercial interference” (cit. in IOC 1950, 26). The 1946 Charter stated that while “emulation” between nations within the Olympic movement was welcome, focusing “above all [on] a national exultation of success achieved rather than the realisation of the common...objective” was a “danger” (IOC 1946, 27). In 1949, a new provision was added to the first Fundamental Principle of Olympism clarifying that “No discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of colour, religion or politics” (IOC 1949, 5), likely influenced by the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948).<sup>9</sup> The 1949 Charter also codified, for the first time, the notion that National Olympic Committees (NOCs) should be “autonomous” (Chappelet 2024, 118).

Indeed, the post-war context posed a number of uneasy questions to those in charge of governing international sport. IOC leaders had to deal once again with the thorny issue of whether and how to reintegrate the countries that had been defeated in WWII—a dilemma that demanded striking a balance between the widespread calls for excluding aggressor states such as Germany, Italy, and Japan (which, as mentioned, had tried to increase their leverage on the Olympic movement in the late 1930s) and the need to preserve the unity and universality of Olympism (Sbetti 2020). Besides, from a longer-term perspective, the most pressing question was how to incorporate into the Olympic movement the Soviet Union and the states of the nascent Communist bloc—key actors in the post-war world that could no longer be excluded by a self-professing “universal” movement. For its part, also thanks to the work of the Soviet sports bureaucracy, the USSR leadership was indeed willing to relaunch the process of integration with Western sport that had made a timid start in the 1930s; amid the Cold War climate, Soviet leaders came to espouse the idea that the Olympics, and international sport, more generally, may be an arena for peaceful confrontation with the US and, at a broader level, between two different social, economic, and political models—the capitalist and the socialist systems (Parks 2007). This new situation, however, required careful

---

<sup>9</sup> Notably, however, unlike the UN Declaration, the Olympic Charter did not mention “sex” as a cause of discrimination.



management by the IOC, as the risk of international tensions spilling over into the sporting fields—in the form of politicized statements, demonstrations, and/or boycotts—was potentially high.

Once the USSR joined the Olympic Games for the first time in Helsinki 1952, the need to shield the Games from (especially pro-communist) political instrumentalization became even more urgent (Keys 2012). On that occasion, the organization of “pro-peace” demonstrations involving high-profile Eastern athletes such as Emil Zatopek caught the eye of the newly elected IOC president, Avery Brundage. A conservative Republican and a staunch anti-communist who, as the then president of the American Olympic Association, had strongly and successfully opposed the boycott campaign against the Berlin Olympics in the 1930s (Marvin 1982), he penned a letter to the IOC members clarifying that this kind of demonstration was a blatant violation of the “unwritten rule according to which politics should not be connected with the Olympic Games” (cit. in Sbeti 2020, 308–309).

Subsequently, in the early years of Brundage’s presidency, several new regulations were introduced to codify that “unwritten rule” and explicitly forbid any “politicization” of the Games. Already in 1952, during the IOC session held in Helsinki, a new set of rules for “regional Games” was introduced, mandating that “[t]here must be no extraneous events connected with the Games, particularly those of a political nature” and that “[t]he loud speaker must be used for sport purposes only and no political speeches are to be permitted” (IOC 1952, 7). The 1955 Charter extended this provision to the bidding process for prospective Olympic cities, requiring candidate hosts to formally “state that no political demonstrations w[ould] be held in the stadium or other sport grounds, or in the Olympic Village, during the Games.” Furthermore, a new clause was added to the Fundamental Principles to underline that “[t]he Games are contests between individuals and not between nations” (IOC 1955, 6).

In effect, being a peaceful competition that “produced easily measured results from which governments and their citizens could draw rapid conclusions,” international sport soon became a key component of the “cultural Cold War” between the US and the USSR (Edelman and Young 2019, 3). Amid this international context, Brundage’s IOC was at pains to underplay—at least on paper—the political significance of the Games. The 1956 Charter pointed out, in a new section devoted to the “scoring of points,” that while “[n]ormal national pride is perfectly legitimate,” “neither the Olympic Games nor any other sport contest can be said to indicate the superiority of one country or of one political system over another” (IOC 1956, 81). In 1962, these considerations were included in a revised form as part of a separate regulation on the “Political use of sport,” which was part of the “eligibility rules” of the IOC:

The International Olympic Committee notes with great satisfaction that its efforts are universally approved, it rejoices in the enthusiasm which the Olympic Movement has encouraged among different nations and it congratulates those which, with a

view of encouraging popular sports have adopted vast programs of physical education.

It considers, however, as dangerous to the Olympic ideals, that, besides the proper development of sports in accordance with the principles of amateurism, certain tendencies exist which aim primarily at a national exaltation of the results gained instead of the realization that the sharing of friendly effort and rivalry is the essential aim of the Olympic Games. (IOC 1962, 8)

Remarkably, this regulation was implicitly praising the Olympic membership of socialist countries (“those which, with a view of encouraging popular sports have adopted vast programs of physical education”), celebrating the “universal” approval for the IOC, and condemning a political instrumentalization of Olympic achievements, all at once.

This new set of norms enshrining the (alleged) rejection of politics in the Charter were evidently a functional adaptation of the Olympic movement to the Cold War environment. In order to preserve the “universal” monopoly of Olympism (and thus, of the IOC) over international sport, the USSR—no longer an international pariah, but a world superpower—had to be integrated into it, while also minimizing the risk of it (and its satellite states) appropriating the Games for political purposes. To be sure, this codification was not enough to prevent controversies and boycotts spilling over into the Games at times of harsh Cold War confrontation, as had already become evident at the Melbourne 1956 Games.<sup>10</sup> Nor should one buy uncritically into the idea that Brundage’s IOC was a pristinely *super partes* or “non-political” organization, as also evidenced by its disproportionate number of (White male and upper-class) European members (Krieger and Wassong 2020).<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough, while the IOC of the Cold War era rejected any form of “politicization” of the Games, it did not assert its own *neutrality*, a term that was absent in the Charters of the time.

The whole apparatus of rules and regulations against the “political use of sport” remained in place, with minor amendments, until the mid-1980s; the only notable addition was the introduction, in 1975, of today’s rule 50.2 of the Olympic Charter, which clarifies that “[e]very kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether political, religious or racial, in the Olympic areas is forbidden” (IOC 1975, 35).<sup>12</sup> These rules were, of course, insufficient to prevent the multiple boycotts that occurred at the Montreal 1976, Moscow 1980, and Los

---

<sup>10</sup> The Melbourne Games were held from late November to early December 1956, just a few weeks after the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Soviet participation prompted a boycott by Switzerland, Spain, and the Netherlands, and several episodes of anti-Soviet contestation were manifest during the Games, as in the case of the USSR–Hungary infamous water polo match known as “Blood in the water.” See Schelfhout (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Remarkably, Soviet proposals to amend the selection procedures for the IOC to make it more broadly representative were staved off by Brundage in the late 1950s (Keys 2012).

<sup>12</sup> On the process leading to the approval of the rule, see Boykoff (2014, 2021).

Angeles 1984 Olympics, nor were they employed to impose significant sanctions against boycotting countries.<sup>13</sup> However, they constituted the normative framework to which the IOC could appeal to reassert its supposedly non-political and “unifying” role amid international crises and tensions, especially those related to the Cold War. For example, in reacting to the US-led campaign of boycott against the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, the IOC reiterated that “the Olympic Games are a series of contests among individuals not countries” and that “the IOC recognises the need for de-politicisation of the Games under the present world climate, including protocol of ceremonies, which will be reviewed for future games” (AMEMBASSY BERN TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1980).

Despite the large boycotts of 1980 and 1984, no new regulations about Olympic neutrality were introduced in the 1980s. Instead, the sudden change in international politics from the mid-1980s onward as a result of the *perestroika* policies, followed by the collapse of the socialist bloc, seemed to make the whole debate about the non-political nature of the Games somehow outdated, especially insofar as the international dimension was concerned. In the 1987 Charter, the regulations on the “Political use of sport” were no longer included in the main text of the Charter (IOC 1987). Amid the apparent triumph of Western capitalism and liberal democracy, the time seemed ripe to move away from functional norms aimed at navigating thorny issues of international politics to resume the focus on the fundamental, universal values of Olympism.

### **Olympic Neutrality from the Post-Cold War Liberal Consensus to the BRICS Phase of the Games**

In the 1990s, the sport–politics nexus was sidelined in the Olympic Charter. In 1990, a new Charter, resulting from eight years of preparatory work prompted by IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, was adopted at the ninety-sixth IOC session in Tokyo. The explicit aim was to “bring [the Olympic Charter] into line with the present day world and help the Olympic Movement prepare to face the transformations of the century ahead” (*Olympic Review* 1990, 489). In the new Charter, the opening “Fundamental Principles” were significantly revised, placing greater emphasis on universal values. For the first time, a definition of Olympism was provided as a “philosophy of life” based on “universal fundamental ethical principles.” The Principles underlined that the goal of the Olympic movement was “to contribute to building a peaceful and better world” and claimed that its activity is “permanent and universal” (IOC 1991). To be sure, in the subsequent Rules, opposition to “any commercial and political abuse of sport and athletes” and the prohibition of “political, religious and racial propaganda...in the Olympic areas” were reiterated (IOC 1991). However, the overall focus was on enshrining once

---

<sup>13</sup> Instead, athletes who broke the rule about political gestures during the Games were often sanctioned, even before explicit regulations on the matter were introduced: the case of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at Mexico 1968 is notable in this regard (Boykoff 2021).

and for all the “global” role and authoritativeness of Olympism in the post–Cold War world (see also Sbeti 2023). In his speech at the ninety-ninth session of the IOC, for example, President Samaranch remarked upon the “trends which are making themselves felt throughout the world, the breath of freedom which is stirring the nations,” pointing out proudly that “one of the first actions taken by newly independent states is to seek recognition of their National Olympic Committees, the first proof of their identity regained” (*Olympic Review* 1992, 411). Through this new narrative, the IOC underlined its role as the supreme authority of global sports in the “liberal international order” of the post–Cold War era. The latter, while US-led, was seemingly taking shape around “a web of international institutions with universal membership” (Mearsheimer 2019), which the Olympic movement evidently considered itself to be a part of.

In the age of the seemingly unstoppable triumph of Western capitalism, the IOC further accelerated the reform process centered on the acceptance of professionalism and commercialization in the Olympic movement that Samaranch had started since the early 1980s (Magdalinski and Nauright 2004). Abandoning the old ethos centered on amateurism, however, implied that Olympism was looking for new sources of legitimacy. This translated not only in the new value-centered discourse adopted in the Olympic Charter but also in a deepening of the relationship with the United Nations, which had never been substantially developed in the Cold War period. In the early post–Cold War years, instead, “sharing custodianship of the universal values of peace and humanity burnished the moral credentials of both beleaguered institution[s]” (Burke 2019, 95). As a result, in 1993, the first resolution on the Olympic Truce was agreed upon by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (IOC 2024b), and in 1995, Samaranch addressed the UNGA, in what the *Olympic Review* described as “the first time that a non-government organization with no status within the UN...ha[s] received special attention from the 185-Member State General Assembly” (*Olympic Review* 1995-6, 4). In his speech, Samaranch pointed out the ideal convergences between the Olympic Committee and the UN, for example in the (allegedly) common struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and concluded by remarking upon the role of Olympism “as a force for conciliation and humanitarianism” (*Olympic Review* 1995-6, 7). A further component of this new approach, centered on universal values within the framework of the Western-led order, was the adoption of the liberal discourse of human rights. Notably, this did not yet materialize as an IOC commitment to *human rights in sport* but rather by framing the practice of *sport as a human right*: as the 1996 Charter clarified, “Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport in accordance with his or her needs” (IOC 1996, 9). Within this new Olympic narrative, there was no urgency to emphasize the unpleasant possibility of political influence over sport among its fundamental principles, at least at the international level. As in the early stages of the Olympic movement, the priority was given to asserting the foundational values of Olympism in a quest for greater global legitimacy, implicitly

underlining the coherence of the Olympic movement with the norms and institutions of the seemingly uncontested Western-led international order.<sup>14</sup>

Once the latter started to falter, however, in the late 2000s, as a result of the first cracks in the US' leadership, the 2007 to 2008 financial crisis, and the more assertive role of non-Western powers (Peterson 2018; Mearsheimer 2019), the IOC was quick in restoring more prominence to sport's "autonomy." As mentioned, the concept had been included in the Charter with reference to the relationship between NOCs and the respective governments since 1949; now, however, it was codified into a governance principle applying at all levels. First, also due to increasing concerns about possible intrusions of EU law in the sports field,<sup>15</sup> between 2006 and 2008, the IOC promoted two seminars on the topic, which was then one of the sub-themes of the 2009 Olympic Congress (Chappelet 2010). Then, in the 2011 Charter, a new chapter was added to the "Fundamental Principles," which stated that "recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall have the rights and obligations of autonomy" (IOC 2011, 10).

Self-professed "autonomy" was apparently not enough, however, to shield international sport from the heightened geopolitical tensions of the 2010s—first and foremost, the emerging US–China rivalry and the revisionist, great-power policy put forward by the Kremlin. The latter directly impacted Olympic sport in 2014, with Russia's annexation of Crimea immediately after the end of the Sochi Olympics and the ensuing scandal surrounding Russian state-sponsored doping (Orttung and Zhemukhov 2017). More generally, in the so-called "BRICS phase of the Games" (Diodato and Strina 2023), the increased organizational and financial role of non-Western countries in international sport implied new challenges for the IOC: assigning international events to authoritarian regimes engaged in rivalry or conflict with Western countries (especially the US) may easily inject geopolitical tensions into the Olympic arena, with reciprocal accusations of "politicization," as evident in the case of the Beijing 2022 Games (Strina and Göbbel 2023).

Against this backdrop, the 133th Olympic Session held in Buenos Aires in October 2018 approved an amendment that, for the first time in the history of the Charter, explicitly introduced the notion of "political neutrality" among the fundamental principles of Olympism:

Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall apply political neutrality. They have the rights and obligations of autonomy, which include freely establishing and controlling the

---

<sup>14</sup> For a critical discussion of the new meaning of Olympism in the early post–Cold War years, see also Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012).

<sup>15</sup> While not strictly related to global developments, this can also be considered an exogenous factor pertaining to the realm of international politics, as it was related to the clarification of EU-level competences during the integration process of the 1990s to early 2000s.

rules of sport, determining the structure and governance of their organisations, enjoying the right of elections free from any outside influence and the responsibility for ensuring that principles of good governance be applied. (IOC 2019, 11)

In presenting the amendment, IOC member John Coates explained that the change was “driven by increased political and geopolitical and nationalistic pressures that the IOC has been experiencing in recent years and the desirability of having a reference point in the principles and in the charter to rely on when resisting them” (IOC Media 2018, 1:09:06–1:10:001).<sup>16</sup> In other words, the IOC itself admitted that this new provision was driven by exogenous factors. Amid the crisis of the liberal international order and the emergence of a highly complex world—“bipolar, multipolar, non-polar all at once” (Tocci 2023)—the Olympic movement was once again forced to codify new regulations in order to provide a functional norm of behavior to be referred to while navigating a volatile international environment.

## Conclusion

Since the origins of modern sport in the second half of the nineteenth century, its relationship with politics—at the national and international levels—has been repeatedly debated and questioned. Over time, international sports organizations such as the IOC have codified a number of norms—such as the rejection of any form of “politicization” and *eventually* the assertion of “political neutrality”—that have helped them navigate the troubled waters of the world’s politics. This process of norm emergence, however, has been far from linear and has been intimately connected with wider events in the realm of international politics.

As this article highlights with regard to the Olympic movement, emphasis on the non-political nature of sport at the international level was greater at times of increased tension in the international arena, such as the Cold War. Conversely, in periods of apparent “order” in the international system, such as the 1990s to early 2000s, the focus shifted on the universal values of Olympism to provide further legitimacy and buttress the organizational monopoly of the IOC. This highlights the inextricable connection of international sport with the international system, of which it can arguably be considered a “secondary institution.”

Today, political neutrality is finally codified as a “Fundamental Principle” of the Olympic movement. A closer analysis, however, makes it evident that neutrality is intended and framed not as a value-oriented principle but rather as a functional norm that is supposed to regulate the behavior of sports organizations. The norm of neutrality is primarily meant as a pragmatic “compass” that can steer the conduct and decision-making of sport officials as well as signal the positioning of international sports organization to external stakeholders such as state actors or the media. At a more foundational level, it serves the purpose of preserving the monopoly of the organizations governing international sport such as the IOC in the face of possible divisions and fragmentation.

---

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEkbkzf\\_E\\_k&list=PLX9eJ\\_kgiRLYDQtSGedTFppl2AOQtHjvI&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEkbkzf_E_k&list=PLX9eJ_kgiRLYDQtSGedTFppl2AOQtHjvI&index=5).

The extent to which political neutrality can effectively be defended by international sports organizations, however, remains questionable, especially in (but not limited to) an era marked by supposedly existential conflicts involving fundamental values. This is evident, for example, from the ongoing debates on how international sport should handle the Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Palestine wars, with different governments accusing the IOC of not respecting the norm of political neutrality for opposite reasons (Goretti 2023). At a time of full-scale wars, blatant violations of international law and widespread human rights abuses, one may argue, with some reason, that the functional norm of neutrality should be superseded by other, more fundamental principles to which the Olympic movement claims to be committed: first and foremost, “promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”

### **AI Acknowledgment**

The author declares that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete essential authoring tasks in this manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## **REFERENCES**

- AMEMBASSY BERN TO SECSTATE WASHDC. 1980. “Olympics: IOC Message to Mr. Cutler, 4/28/1980.” Bern, F-2011-00809. [https://foia.state.gov/Search/results.aspx?searchText=\\*%&caseNumber=F-2011-00809](https://foia.state.gov/Search/results.aspx?searchText=*%&caseNumber=F-2011-00809).
- Belcastro, F. 2023. “A Game of Politics? International Sport Organisations and the Role of Sport in International Politics.” *International Spectator* 58 (2): 107–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2023.2205789>.
- Boykoff, J. 2014. *Activism and the Olympics: Dissent at the Games in Vancouver and London*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Boykoff, J. 2017. “Protest, Activism, and the Olympic Games: An Overview of Key Issues and Iconic Moments.” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 34 (3–4): 162–183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1356822>.
- Boykoff, J. 2021. “Athlete Activism and the Olympic Games—A Dialectic of Resistance and Restriction.” In *Athlete Activism—Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by R. Magrath, 8–19. London: Routledge.
- Budd, A., and R. Levermore. 2004. *Sport and International Relations*. London: Routledge.

- Burke, R. 2019. "Peace: The United Nations, the International Olympic Committee, and the Renovation of the Olympic Truce." In *The Ideals of Global Sport: From Peace to Human Rights*, edited by B. J. Keys, 85–106. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Carpentier, F., and J.-P. Lefèvre. 2006. "The Modern Olympic Movement, Women's Sport and the Social Order during the Inter-War Period." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23 (7): 1112–1127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360600832387>.
- Chappelet, J.-L. 2010. *Autonomy of Sport in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Chappelet, J.-L. 2024. "The Century-Long Struggle for the Leadership of World Sport." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 41: 111–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2024.2341830>.
- Chatziefstathiou, D. 2008. "Reading Baron Pierre de Coubertin: Issues of Gender and Race." <https://digital.la84.org/digital/api/collection/p17103coll10/id/6450/download>.
- Chatziefstathiou, D., and I. P. Henry. 2012. *Discourses of Olympism: From the Sorbonne 1894 to London 2012*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clay Large, D. 2007. *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Cornelissen, S. 2013. "Sport Mega-Events as Political Mega-Projects." In *A Companion to Sport*, edited by D. L. Andrews and B. Carrington, 411–426. Blackwell Publishing.
- de Coubertin, P. 2000. *Selected Writings*, edited by N. Müller. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee.
- Del Bò, C., and S. Bastianon. 2023. *La neutralità dello sport* [The Neutrality of Sport]. Rome: Carocci.
- Dichter, H. L. 2021. "The Diplomatic Turn: The New Relationship between Sport and Politics." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 38 (2–3): 247–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1894135>.
- Diodato, E., and V. Strina. 2023. "Olympic Diplomacy as Contestation: The Legacy of the Beijing Olympics." *International Spectator* 58 (2): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2023.2204023>.
- Edelman, R., and C. Young. 2019. *The Whole World Was Watching: Sport in the Cold War*. Stanford University Press.
- Finnemore, M., and K. Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52 (4): 887–917. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>.
- Goretti, L. 2023. "The Olympics of Discontent: Paris 2024 and Russia's War against Ukraine". *IAI Commentaries* No. 64/2023, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/olympics-discontent-paris-2024-and-russias-war-against-ukraine>.
- Gounot, A. 2015. "Social Democratic and Communist Influences on Workers' Sport across Europe (1893–1939)." *Labour History Review* 80 (1): 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.3828/lhr.2015.1>.
- Grix, J., and B. Houlihan. 2014. "Sports Mega-Events as Part of a Nation's Soft Power Strategy: The Cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012)." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16 (4): 572–596. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856X.12017>.



- Hoberman, J. 1995. "Toward a Theory of Olympic Internationalism." *Journal of Sport History* 22 (1): 1–37. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43610134>.
- Hodgson, G. 2006. "What Are Institutions?" *Journal of Economic Issues* 40 (1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2006.11506879>.
- Internationales Olympisches Institut. 1938. *Olympische Gesetze. Règles Olympiques. Olympic Rules*. Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1908. *Annuaire* [Yearbook]. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1930. *Charte des Jeux Olympiques* [Charter of the Olympic Games], 1st ed. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee), ed. 1933. *The International Olympic Committee and the Modern Olympic Games*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1946. *Olympic Rules*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1949. *Olympic Rules*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1950. *The International Olympic Committee and the Modern Olympic Games*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1952. *Règles pour les Jeux Régionaux* [Rules for Regional Games]. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1955. *The Olympic Games—Charter, Rules, and Regulations*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1956. *The Olympic Games—Fundamental Principles, Rules, and Regulations*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1962. *Règles du Comité International Olympique sur les Conditions d'Admission aux Jeux Olympiques* [Eligibility Rules of the International Olympic Committee]. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1975. *Olympic Rules, Bye-Laws and Instructions*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1987. *Olympic Charter*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1991. *Olympic Charter: In Force as from 16th June 1991*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 1996. *Olympic Charter*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 2011. *Olympic Charter*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 2019. *Olympic Charter*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 2023. *Olympic Charter*. Olympic Study Centre.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 2024a. *Why Lausanne?* <https://olympics.com/ioc/pierre-de-coubertin/why-lausanne>.
- IOC (International Olympic Committee). 2024b. *Olympic Truce Resolutions*. <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-truce/resolutions>.

- IOC Media. 2018. “133rd IOC Session—Day 2—Afternoon Session.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEkbkzf\\_E\\_k&list=PLX9eJ\\_kgiRLYDQtSGedTFppl2AOQtHjvI&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEkbkzf_E_k&list=PLX9eJ_kgiRLYDQtSGedTFppl2AOQtHjvI&index=7).
- IOC Media. 2023. “141st IOC Session—Day 1 (Original).” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SG1dFN2Ec8>.
- Keohane, R. O. 1988. “International Institutions: Two Approaches.” *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (4): 379–396. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600589>.
- Keys, B. 2012. “The Early Cold War Olympics, 1952–1960: Political, Economic and Human Rights Dimensions.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies*, edited by H. Jefferson Lenskyj and S. Wagg, 72–87. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kluge, V. 2014. “Cancelled but Still Counted, and Never Annulled: The Games of 1916.” *Journal of Olympic History* 22 (2): 9–17.
- Krieger, J. 2022. “Keeping Politics out.” In *Verfassungsblog: On Matters Constitutional*, 7 February, <https://verfassungsblog.de/keeping-politics-out/>.
- Krieger, J., and S. Wassong. 2020. “The Composition of the IOC: Origins and Key Turning Points in the Governance of the Olympic Movement.” In *Routledge Handbook of the Olympic and Paralympic Games*, edited by D. Chatziefstathiou, B. García, and B. Séguin, 203–216. London: Routledge.
- MacAloon, J. J. 2008. *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*. London: Routledge.
- Magdalinski, T., and J. Nauright. 2004. “Commercialisation of the Modern Olympics.” In *The Commercialisation of Sport*, edited by T. Slack, 185–204. London: Routledge.
- Marvin. 1982. “Avery Brundage and American Participation in the 1936 Olympic Games.” *Journal of American Studies* 16 (1): 81–106. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002187580000949X>.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. 2019. “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order.” *International Security* 43 (4): 7–50. [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00342](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342).
- Müller, N. 2000. “Coubertin’s Olympism.” In P. de Coubertin, *Selected Writings*, edited by N. Müller, 33–48. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee.
- Murray, S. 2018. *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Næss, H.-E. 2018. “The Neutrality Myth: Why International Sporting Associations and Politics Cannot Be Separated.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 45 (2): 144–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2018.1479190>.
- Næss, H.-E. 2022. *The Neutrality Paradox in Sport*. Springer Nature.
- Nygård, H. M., and S. Gates. 2013. “Soft Power at Home and Abroad: Sport Diplomacy, Politics and Peace-Building.” *International Area Studies Review* 16 (3): 235–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865913502971>.
- Olympic Review*. 1990. *Olympic Review: Official Publication of the Olympic Movement*, No. 277, November. Olympic Study Centre.

- Olympic Review*. 1992. *Olympic Review: Official Publication of the Olympic Movement*, No. 299, September. Olympic Study Centre.
- Olympic Review*. 1995-6. *Olympic Review: Official Publication of the Olympic XXV* (6), December-January Movement. Olympic Study Centre.
- Orttung, R. Z., and S. Zhemukhov. 2017. *Putin's Olympics: The Sochi Games and the Evolution of Twenty-First Century Russia*. London: Routledge.
- Parks, J. 2007. "Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureaucracy, and the Soviet Union's Entrance into the Olympic Games 1946–1952." In *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, edited by S. Smith and D. L. Andrews, 35–54. London: Routledge.
- Peterson, J. 2018. "Present at the Destruction? The Liberal Order in the Trump Era." *International Spectator* 53 (1): 28–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1421295>.
- Sbetti, N. 2020. *Giochi diplomatici: Sport e politica estera nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra* [Diplomatic Games: Sport and Foreign Policy in Post-war Italy]. Treviso-Rome: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche-Viella.
- Sbetti, N. 2023. "Il principio di apoliticità dello sport" [The Principle of Sport's Apoliticism]. In *La neutralità dello sport* [The Neutrality of Sport], edited by C. Del Bò, 58–74. Rome: Carocci.
- Schelfhout, S. T. 2017. "It is 'Force Majeure'": The Abrupt Boycott Movements of the 1956 Melbourne Summer Olympic Game. MS. Kin thesis. The University of Texas at Austin.
- Spandler, K. 2015. "The Political International Society: Change in Primary and Secondary Institutions." *Review of International Studies* 41 (3): 601–622. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24564345>.
- Strina, V., and M. Göbbel. 2023. "The European Contestation of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics: A Media Perspective." *International Spectator* 58 (2): 35–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2023.2200639>.
- Tocci, N. 2023. "Bipolar, Multipolar, Nonpolar All at Once: Our World at the Time of the Russia–Ukraine War." *IAI Commentaries* No. 42/2023. <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/bipolar-multipolar-nonpolar-all-once>.
- Tomlinson, A. 2005. *Sport and Leisure Cultures*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- United Nations. 1948. *A Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations Department of Public Information.
- Walters, G. 2009. *Berlin Games: How the Nazis Stole the Olympic Dream*. HarperCollins.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Leo Goretti:** Editor of *The International Spectator* and Head of Italy's Foreign Policy Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome, Italy  
Email: [l.goretti@iai.it](mailto:l.goretti@iai.it)